DISTANCE EDUCATION AS WORK: Making Distance Education Work in Campus Universities

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

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2018

Abstract

This thesis is about distance education as work in campus universities. It seeks to understand how distance education arose and has been sustained in campus universities. The research uncovers that critical to the development and sustainability of distance education are the workers (academic and administrative) who believe and are committed to this form of provision for those who are otherwise unable to study.

The literature on distance education rarely addresses the role of the distance education workers. Rather it suggests that distance education is very unlikely to develop, let alone be sustained, if the appropriate infra structure is not in place to support it. More recently a contrasting approach, ignoring policies and organisational structures, suggests that the wide scale adoption of learning technologies will mainstream distance education into conventional university provision. There will be little or no difference between the two methods of course delivery. My professional observation was that neither accounts could explain the vibrant and successful distance education that had grown bottom up within departments in campus universities in the UK. This provision, whilst successful, remained marginal to mainstream university teaching and learning.

The research for this thesis took place between 2012 and 2015. It utilises an iterative ethnographically informed interview process and was in two stages. The first stage was concerned with ascertaining what ten internationally well known and successful leaders of distance education provision considered to be the critical factors for successful distance education provision. Called the leader/experts in the research, I had anticipated that they would stress leadership and management - and they did. However what emerged from these first stage conversations was that above all else it was the people who worked in distance education who made it take off and thrive. Thus whilst infra structure and technology were important, they were second order considerations for success. These leader/experts pointed to the team working and shared values of distance education workers and their role, as leaders in distance education,

was to provide an enabling environment for distance education workers. The second and substantive stage of the research explores how 27 distance education workers in 6 departments in three UK campus universities, describe their work and why it is important to them.

The analysis of the research data suggests that distance education workers, in all research sites, saw themselves as working in non hierarchical teams where all, regardless of grade or role, supported each other, worked cooperatively and learned together. This is described as the distance education community of practice and is seen by the distance education workers as very different to the typical (individualistic and competitive) ways of working in academic departments. In addition the interviewees all stressed their involvement and engagement with their distance education students, and emphasised that in all aspects of their work they were student centred. Interviewees also stressed their belief in the benefit of distance education, in particular emphasising the values of access. These core ideas and dispositions are described in the thesis as the distance education habitus. The distance education community of practice and distance education habitus give the distance education workers a sense of identity separate to their campus colleagues and explains their tireless efforts to 'work around' the systems and processes of the campus university, which are not designed to ensure the flexibility distance education students require for successful study.

However all the interviewees, but most particularly in two of the universities (A and C), also reported that these ways of working were being eroded and stifled by changing managerial practices that promoted what were described as more 'efficient' ways of running the university. These managerial practices included technology led systems approaches to the management of all students, and changing requirements demanded of academic staff.

The thesis concludes by drawing analogies with other public sector provision and noting the contradictions that whilst higher education policy makers are addressing the need for flexibility the operational management of universities are making this harder to achieve.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to all my interviewees, who must remain unnamed, but who gave tirelessly of their time and shared their insights, their knowledge, their joy and pain, about their work in distance education. I hope I have represented you well.

This thesis would not have been completed without the support of my supervisor Professor John Goodwin. John gave me invaluable advice and suggested what I might read when I felt that I was hitting a brick wall. He also encouraged me to apply for, and supported my application, to attend a writing workshop in Italy. This proved invaluable in overcoming my 'writers block'. But most of all I have enjoyed discussing ideas with John. I am going to miss these meetings of ours.

I am very grateful to the Commonwealth of Learning who made it possible for me to interview leader/experts in Vancouver and to Denise Tremblay for recording them. Grateful thanks are due to Claire Wintram for her advice about style and proof reading my first draft and to Michele Benn for the final proof reading. Also many thanks to Jenny Evans for assisting me with the tricky issue of format and layout.

I have been very privileged at this stage of my life to be able to undertake this research. My thanks to the University of Leicester for making it possible for me to study and for enabling me to access the brilliant library. The library and the library staff are a treasure.

Thank you to all my ex colleagues and friends who work in, or have worked in, distance education. I have indeed been lucky to work with you all. I have learnt so much from you.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, long dead, who lived at a time when it was not possible for them to access higher education but who knew so well the emancipatory power of education. They would have understood the

importance of distance education and its ability to open up access to the disadvantaged and excluded.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis on distance education addresses the question: how did distance education come to be in campus universities and how is it sustained? With the implicit corollary to this question: what impedes and undermines its development?

I have worked in distance education for most of my professional life having started as a part time tutor counsellor at the UK Open University, (when they still had such jobs), and then holding a number of full time academic and administrative posts at the university. And I have worked for, or with, a number of universities and colleges both in the UK and overseas concerned with developing and delivering distance education programmes. I would describe myself as someone who believes that distance education is a 'good thing', enabling people to study who would otherwise not have been able to do so. It does this by enabling students to study whilst not attending the physical campus and face to face lectures and classes[1].

Despite the huge potential and the fabulous successes of distance education - e.g. the UK OU, China Central Radio and TV University, the ABET[2] programme of the University of South Africa, Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia, dual mode provision at some Australian and Canadian universities, to name but a few, many attempts to build distance education in the UK from within campus universities struggle for recognition and support within the home university itself. And this is so even when distance education programmes may involve relatively large numbers and bring in considerable income. This is a problem I had also observed in developing countries when working for a development agency concerned with building capacity through distance education, and also when working full time in a dual - mode developing country university. It was from

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[1]Which is not to say distance education students do not attend occasional workshops or residential programmes providers may offer. These are sometimes optional and sometimes compulsory.

[2] ABET makes basic education available and accessible to youths and adults

these experiences and observations that the key question of the research emerged: How did distance education come to be in UK campus universities and how is it sustained?

Much has been written about the very particular form of organisation required to make distance education work. Distance education is seen as markedly different to face to face education. The dominant literature on distance education does not focus on the people who make distance education happen and who give it meaning, significance, and value. Unlike this literature this thesis uncovers the centrality of the distance education workers and how they have made this form of provision a success in campus universities. (Success is a loaded word but broadly I define it as achieving the outcomes those who set it up and work in it want, whilst also achieving the aims and desires of the students who study by this method.)

The study did not start with a focus on distance education workers. Rather it started in the orthodox literature of distance education, explored in chapter 3 which emphasises the organisational and technology requirements for distance education to both develop and become sustainable. This was hardly surprising since I was steeped in this literature and indeed have contributed to it. But early on in the research process, in the stage one interviews with leader/experts (see chapter 5), it became clear that this literature could not adequately explain the emergence of distance education in campus universities. Rather the leader/experts were indicating that the distance education teams with their collegiality, and shared values were critical to the development and sustainability of distance education in campus universities. Their role as leaders as they described it was in terms of fostering the working culture that enabled distance education workers to thrive. One in which the distance education workers felt enabled and valued. And it was this they felt was critical to success. Inevitably therefore the research focus moved from the leader/experts, who might have been assumed to have introduced the infrastructure and technology seen in the literature as so central to success, to the distance education workers

themselves who both made it happen and also sustained it. A bottom up provision as described by the workers in the interviews reported in chapter 6.

This emerging research focus on the distance education workers led me to explore the literature beyond the field of distance education to help me understand what I was uncovering through my interviews. Following suggestions from my supervisor I explored the literature of communities of practice and habitus. The concept of community of practice enabled me to identify clearly the distance education workers that had been hinted at in the first stage interviews when leader/experts referred to teams and team working. The distance education workers had been ignored or unseen in the dominant distance education literature. These workers share the same work interests (distance education) and they cooperate together working collectively to further develop their practice (Wenger 1998) in what can be seen as a network of interdependencies around the doing of their work. This is described in the thesis as the distance education community of practice. Habitus is the (frequently) unspoken values and attitudes that bind people into groups, and guides, often subconsciously, their actions. As the research progressed and the strength and commonality of these values to the distance education workers became ever clearer, I described these values, and the dispositions of the distance education workers who held them so deeply, as the distance education habitus.

A key aspect of the distance education habitus is the belief in access to higher education and the role of the university and distance education workers to ensure that this is enabled. In chapter 2 (A brief history of distance education) it is possible to see that this fundamental belief about access has deep roots, and has been at the heart of all distance education provision. It is not surprising therefore that it is a value held dearly by the distance education workers studied. Indeed the distance education habitus frequently means that the distance education workers come into conflict with the campus university management when the distance education workers feel the actions of the university are harmful and run counter to ensuring meaningful access for their students. The most frequently quoted example of this across all research sites

was the lack of flexibility in university regulations, a requirement all felt was essential for meaningful access and thus successful distance education itself. A feature of distance education systems emphasised in the foundational literature (chapter 3). All interviewees emphasised the way they 'worked around' university rules and regulations in order to support their distance education students. However interviewees also reported that with growing managerial control in the university their ability to 'work around' rules and regulations was being compromised as university managements imposed one size fits all regulations and IT systems.

This thesis, as has been described, started firmly from within the orthodoxies of the distance education literature. The turn away from this literature to the more sociologically informed literature, whilst at the same time undertaking the research, led to a dynamic interplay between the sociological concepts of communities of practice and habitus in shining a light on and explaining what had been left unexamined in the distance education literature - namely the role of the distance education workers - whilst also offering an understanding and explanation for the key way distance education workers make distance education work in campus universities in the UK.

Inevitably this shift of focus to one exploring the distance education workers, presented further possible themes for exploration. For instance in describing their work, most interviewees, both male and female, described their involvement with their students. Their concern for their students, their admiration and respect for them and their friendships with them. One interviewee (SG admin University C) described the requirement for kindness as a critical quality of distance education workers which, she maintained, should underpin all distance education work. And many interviewees referred to the need for empathy. Empathy was seen in the research as a core feature of the distance education habitus. Thus a further area for exploration, it could be argued, would be to explore distance education as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) and since the gendered nature of emotional labour has been widely acknowledged, an exploration of whether distance education is

feminised labour could be a future pathway for research. Especially since there is both an increasing interest in men working in fields that require caring and interpersonal skills, and because of the personal cost to workers of such work (Simpson 2007). This personal cost was clearly perceived in the research with distance education workers having time off for 'stress' as wider management of the university undermined their efforts on behalf of their students. This was not however the trajectory of the research. Rather the concern was to explore the commonality for all workers, male and female, of their community of practice and habitus and the extent to which this helped understand the emergence and sustainability of distance education in campus universities.

Chapter two offers a very brief history of distance education and locates the growth of distance education in the self improvement movement of the nineteenth century. It also seeks to show how the emergence of distance education as an educational philosophy and methodology in the twentieth century harnessed concerns and commitment for students who were excluded from mainstream provision. These values have become central to those who work in distance education and formed a critical aspect of the distance education habitus that was uncovered in the study. So even whilst distance education provision invariably requires students to pay fees that cover costs, and in some cases to make a profit, those who work in distance education - the distance education workers of this study - have always maintained a commitment to ensuring that access is not compromised. And it is towards this end that they work tirelessly. The chapter also reports the general growth of distance education provision in campus universities, noting that this is usually but not exclusively at post graduate level.

Chapter three explores the literature of distance education. A significant part of this literature is directed at the organisational systems and processes that are seen to make distance education work and which need to be in place for it to be sustained. Possibly such accounts have this focus because they are directed at governments, policy makers and institutional leaders. But the impact of such accounts is to suggest that distance education can not take off and survive in campus universities since such systems and structures are rarely if ever in

place. Another direction taken by the literature in recent years has been a focus on the adoption of learning technologies for teaching and learning in campus universities. In championing these technologies the argument is made that distance education has become so integrated into campus university provision it is on the way to being mainstreamed. The learning technologies - e.g. learning management systems, lecture capture, e-learning, electronic library access, etc. - make it possible for students to study anywhere. Thus the emphasis is on the learning technologies harnessed by distance education provision that make it work, and have led to distance education methods (aka the technology) becoming ubiquitous and distance education mainstreamed. The chapter suggests that neither of these accounts are adequate given that fairly long standing successful distance education provision exists in campus universities. It has grown bottom up - i.e. it has been departmentally crafted and sustained by key individuals without institutional infrastructure and support. Also there is little or no evidence to suggest that distance education is being mainstreamed if one understands mainstreaming to be the absorption into the operations and culture of campus universities of those practices that would enable distance education to operate on equal terms to face to face provision. The chapter then turns to the literature that is more grounded. Case studies that describe particular distance education practice and a specific research project are explored for the evidence for mainstreaming. As a result a more complex picture emerges than that offered by the dominant distance education literature. This literature suggests that to understand the emergence and operation of distance education in campus universities a good starting place would be to focus on the practice of distance education workers and listen to what they say, which is in fact what the key research reported in this thesis did. However as the chapter on methodology recounts, research practice is not a linear process. And appreciating this practice based literature and recognising its role in helping to construct the research questions and approach, was an iterative process of thinking, reading, research and more thinking, reading and research.

The research journey, and the issues raised by the journey, are described in chapter four. The methodological approach was not the classic hypothesis testing of more positivistic approaches to sociology. Rather it was an emergent,

iterative approach based on listening to the stories and accounts given by the interviewed subjects and privileging the hitherto unheard voices of distance education - those who the thesis describes as the distance education workers; the academics and administrators[3] who work in developing and maintaining distance education programmes on campus universities. The approach is ethnographically informed - eliciting stories and narratives from interviewees - and thus sits firmly on the qualitative side of the quantitative/qualitative divide. It is recognised that this approach can only uncover a partial understanding, albeit a powerful one, of distance education in campus universities. And in discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology epistemological issues are raised as well as the role of the researcher themselves in the knowledge generation process. This chapter also describes how the focus of the thesis moved from a simple assumption that management and leaders of universities are critical to successful distance education provision in UK campus universities to a focus on those described as distance education workers. The chapter also describes the unanticipated issues that arose for me, the researcher, listening to the stress and trauma experienced by many of the interviewees working in campus universities in the present, rapidly changing times at campus universities. An issue that I came to realise is inherent in much of present day social science research but for which I felt ill prepared and powerless, and which raised moral issues for me as the researcher. These are discussed briefly in the chapter.

The next two chapters, five and six, report the findings of the research. Chapter five reports on the interviews with international leaders and managers of distance education provisions, which are called the leader/experts, and chapter six the workers in distance education departments offering distance education programmes in three UK campus based universities. The findings emphasise the importance of the workers in making distance education work. In the leader/ expert accounts (chapter 5) what was highlighted as core to success in delivering distance education programmes, over and above all the technical and organisational, social and political explanations, was a recognition concerning

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[3]The term administrator includes all those non academic workers who might work in distance education e.g. instructional designers.

the critical importance of the ways distance education workers worked in interdependent and mutually supportive teams, and their shared values and commitment to both their students and to their distance education co-workers. Chapter six, building on the findings reported in chapter five, enabled distance education workers to describe what they did and how they did it. What emerged was that without these workers 'working around' the campus university procedures and processes, nothing would be achieved. They indeed had a highly developed sense of team / community working (a community of practice) and shared values concerning both the importance of student centredness in all aspects of their work and their core belief in the right of all to access higher education. These values and the ability to practice them gave meaning to what they did and was a measure to themselves of their worth as workers. This was described as the distance education habitus. However the three universities were, during the research period, rapidly and radically changing, and this was having a profound and negative impact on the distance education workers interviewed breaking up their teams and impeding their ability to 'work around'.

Distance education workers had not been given a frontline place in understanding how distance education worked in the predominant distance education literature as described in chapter 3. Which is not to say they were entirely overlooked, after all many writers recognised the need for training, but that the workers might be the active agents for successful distance education was not a feature of the mainstream literature. But once they were given a voice they became core to the research as it developed. For by focusing on the distance education workers it became possible to discern and make visible what in the past had been invisible - the distance education community of practice and the distance education habitus. These concepts, the thesis argues in chapter seven, explain how distance education emerged and was sustained in campus universities, the glue between the academic and administrative systems of conventional distance education discourse.

Chapter eight argues the managerial changes taking place in universities, informed by the ubiquity of neoliberalism, is destroying the environment that made it possible for distance education to exist within a wider system that had

not been designed for distance education but which the distance education workers had become adept at 'working around'. Thus, for example departmental, integrated, distance education teams were broken up in the name of efficiency, inflexible one size fits all procedures and regulations and IT systems were rolled out which were incompatible to the flexibility required for distance education students - usually adults with busy and predictably unpredictable lives. And academics once key members of the integrated multi professional distance education teams were increasingly subject to evaluation based on their research outputs thus discouraging them from committing to the demands of distance education. In this context it is suggested, and with parallels from other service areas - health, local government, schooling - distance education was becoming a hollowed-out shell of what it had been.

The thesis concludes in chapter nine by drawing the findings together with respect to the distance education community of practice and habitus, and the implications of the corrosive impact of Managerialism on these and distance education practice in general, despite a seeming paradox of growing numbers of distance education programmes. In a sense the research findings might be seen as a microcosm of the whole campus - as the strikes of early 2018 might suggest. Thus what makes distance education work in campus universities - the community of practice and the distance education habitus of the workers - may, it is mooted, shed light on what makes public service work in general and suggest what senior management in public services might give consideration to - namely fostering the environment in which workers can work to their best and feel valued. However it is recognised that university management does not sit in a vacuum. Thus for example, neoliberalism frequently means large scale societal problems, (the funding of universities), are sent down the pipeline to small and weak units unable to cope with them. The thesis concludes by speculating that an interesting further area of study might be the extent to which distance education has itself provided a model for restructuring the university - part time teaching contracts and the use of educational technology. And in this sense, ironically, those in the academy who failed to understand the original vision of distance education and who traduced it as the harbinger of reduced quality and standards, might now as a result have some basis for their claims.

This thesis uses the word 'work' in many and perhaps confusing ways. It is a homograph. The overarching question of the thesis addresses how does distance education work in campus universities? Meaning how did it get established and how does it survive in campus universities? At the same time there is distance education work. This usage encapsulates the labour and the practices of distance education workers. There is also the usage of work that speaks to the systems and process of distance education infrastructure described in the literature of distance education. Thus from this perspective distance education can only work when such systems and processes are in place. When it is possible I try to use a different formulation of words. But when this makes the sentence rather cumbersome I have used 'work' and hopefully the meaning is clear in the context in which it is used.The thesis largely follows the academic convention of writing in the third person. But as has been the case with this introduction, where it has been important to locate the research in my own professional history, and in chapter four where the methodological research journey became too tortuous and confusing to describe, the first person has been used.

For the purposes of this thesis no distinction is made between distance education and distance learning. All of the interviewees talked about distance learning, possibly reflecting their student focus. In the text I have used the term distance education because I have wanted to emphasise the model of education. And the distinction gave me a linguistic device to distinguish between my researcher/authorial voice and the voice of the interviewees. I have tended not to use abbreviations. However where interviewees use them e.g. 'DL' for distance learning I have retained this. Similarly the Open University is not always described as the OU since there are a number of open universities around the world. The UK Open University is abbreviated to UKOU. Interviewees tended always to say OU.

Chapter 2. Brief History of Distance Education in the UK.

The basic principles of distance education are simple and uncontentious – teaching and learning can take place without the teacher and learner meeting face to face. This applies whether the provision is primarily print based, audio/ radio based, video/television based, satellite based, or internet based – or any combination of these technologies. This differentiates distance education from all forms of conventional face to face provision and as Holmberg has shown one could argue that 'letter writing for the purpose of teaching is probably as old as the art of writing itself' (Holmberg 2005 p.13)

The Early Years.

Education is more than exposition and requires feedback to the learner in some form. The introduction of cheap postal services made possible correspondence between a learner and a tutor. One of the most famous early examples of this was the teaching of shorthand by Isaac Pitman in the 1840s. And it is from this time that one can see many correspondence study programmes developing and the beginning of organised distance education taking place. Although Sewart et al (1984 p.1) note that the term distance education came into usage once the more 'advanced' audio and video technologies became available.

These early developments - which covered both practical and academic subjects - frequently prepared students for examination by other institutions and organisations that they had no access to. Thus in the UK for example University Correspondence College, Cambridge (later called the National Extension College) was founded to prepare students to sit University of London's external degrees[4] (Perraton 1978 p.11). And Diploma Correspondence College, later called Wolsey Hall Oxford, prepared students for a yet wider range of qualifications. Elliott (1978) has argued that the demand for and rise of systematic correspondence education is explained by a number of factors. 1)

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[4]In 1858 the University of London opened its degrees to any male student regardless of their location. As an examining body it did not teach its students. This allowed the development of separate commercial services that supported registered students.

the rise of written examinations as a method of selection e.g. in the Civil Service; 2) the growth of professional bodies for professions like banking, accounting and engineering that set their own professional examinations, and 3) the growth of professional journals through which qualified tutors could be recruited (Elliott 1978 p.12).

Obtaining formal qualifications was undoubtedly a very significant 'driver' for the growth of correspondence education since distance education students had no other possibility of obtaining such qualifications other than through this method of study. However it should also be remembered that this was a time of working class self-improvement when the public lending library movement gained force and when adult part time education for example, in the UK organised by the Mechanics' Institutes (founded in the first half of the nineteenth century) was concerned with education in the broadest sense – cultural as well as personal development. Thus it would not be true to say that distance education was simply concerned with study for formal qualifications associated with entry into a career and then career advancement. An early example of American home study correspondence education was developed by Anna Eliot Tickner, the founder and organiser of the Boston based Society to Encourage Study at Home. The Society operated from 1873 until Tickner died in 1897. She devised programmes of study around monthly correspondence with guided readings which formed a vital part of the Society's personalised instruction. Most of Tickner's students were women studying what Mathiesson (quoted in Holmberg 2005 p. 14) described as a classical curriculum. Significantly this was at a time when women were beginning to demand access to higher education. Correspondence education clearly gave women access to education, and whilst the students of distance education are not the focus of this study, it should be noted that there has been some debate in the distance education literature concerning whether the provision of distance education for women preserved patriarchal arrangements by keeping women out of regular colleges and universities (Faith 1988). On the other hand for many Black people like Rosa Parks distance learning was the only way to get any form of education - (the first correspondence schools in the United States were founded in 1873) - as it

was for those imprisoned on Robben Island during the era of apartheid South Africa. These examples underline the importance of access as a foundational idea underpinning distance education and, interestingly, highlight the need for 'personalised' tuition through the means of correspondence. It was recognised that distance education required more than the dispatch of study materials.

At first distance education was largely the preserve of private correspondence colleges that had

> 'sprung up, in England, France and Germany as well as in other European countries … (and) … later on other continents. They became important because they offered tuition to those people who were neglected by the educational system, among them gifted persons who wanted to climb socially in order to improve their living condition and the quality of their life' (Peters 2004 p. 14).

Entrepreneurs, mainly in the field of publishing, had been quick to identify '*that profits could be made from meeting the educational demands*' (Peters 2004 p. 14) of people whose needs were neglected. Thus from its inception distance education developed as a method to provide study opportunities for people who were excluded from formal public educational provision, but it was not simply a philanthropic activity.   Indeed in this respect there is a similarity between circulating lending libraries, established in the eighteenth century by booksellers and publishers which charged a subscription fee, and distance education. Fundamentally, and not without contradictions, both created a means to enable access to knowledge and education whilst at the same time enabling money to be made from fees charged. As more and more people recognised the need for education and training, the quality of correspondence provision from private providers became a critical issue. For example providers frequently took up front fees, with an assumed (and actual) high student drop out, providing a tidy profit. Not surprisingly this practice did give distant education a bad name - big on promise and poor on outcomes. Recognising the need for personalised student focused support became a key aspect of ethical distance education

provision. And ensuring the quality of student support was a critical aspect of the distance education habitus as this thesis uncovered.

A New Era.

A new era emerged in the 1960s with publicly supported distance education colleges and universities. First was the University of South Africa (1962), then UK Open University (1971) and then there followed single mode distance universities in many other parts of the world – e.g. Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Israel, Canada, Venezuela to name a few (See Holmberg 2001 p. 17-19). These were single mode degree awarding universities only offering distance education courses. But at the same time some campus based universities e.g. in Australia chose, or were mandated by their state governments, to offer programmes of study to off campus students who because of huge geographical distances had no opportunity to attend in person to study on campus. These universities are known as dual mode – 'referring to both conventional and distance education modes of teaching and learning' (Holmberg 2005 p. 19) and in both modes distance education was specifically for adult students who had missed out on formal education – because of the war or lack of opportunity generally. Perraton writing about the National Extension College noted that even twenty years after the end of the Second World War '*we were still picking up the casualties of the education service*' (Perraton 1978 p.2).

Distance education filled this gap in provision and challenged the traditional idea that '*scarcity is the controlling condition of educational opportunity*' (Hall 1996 p. 8). Distance education developed as a method to provide study opportunities for people who were unable, or had missed out on, for whatever reason, regular face to face educational provision. Since the beginning of distance education – whether provided privately or publicly or in single or dual mode institutions – the aim of distance education educators has been to provide learning opportunities to those outside traditional schools, colleges and universities. To make it possible for students to learn wherever and whenever they can and to facilitate study for those who are working and have busy family

lives. The editors of Otto Peters' [5]'Distance Education in Transition' noted that what underpinned his work was a humanist vision

> *'to bring about more equity and more equality of educational opportunity by designing more models of high quality distance education in industrialised as well as in developing countries.' (Peters 2004 p. 7)*

This vision was expressed by many of the early theorists in the field (e.g. Charles Wedemeyer 1982) and was also captured in the mission of the UK Open University – 'open to people, places, methods and ideas'. Indeed the pioneers of distance education who set up the UK Open University had a clear social agenda. The Labour Government, under Harold Wilson in the early 1960s, had decided to take action to address the continuing exclusion from higher education of people from lower income groups. Building on the vision of Michael Young, a social reformer and political activist, the Labour government saw that new technologies such as radio and television could be harnessed to bring education to a wide audience. But it was not the technology but openness that was the dominating idea of the OU (see Perry 1977)

> *'Our founders enshrined it in our name, rejecting our first working title of The University of the Air, to mark that the truly significant principle on which the institution rested was not the technological revolution in education, but that adults could be trusted to select themselves for higher education, whatever their previous qualifications, and that great numbers would do so successfully. ..' (*The Open University 1988*).*

Many of the early academic staff at the OU were politically committed to these ideals and took considerable career risks joining what was then an institution

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[5]Peters is regarded as an 'outstanding authority in the field of distance education and acknowledged as having far reaching influence on the development - theory and practice - of distance education' (Peters 2004 p.7).

with a very uncertain future and requiring a very different approach to university work.

> *It is true that the first wave of OU academics - those subsequently called 'the 69's' - were taking a big risk with their careers. But happily it turned out for me to be the best career move I ever made. The OU was to exceed even our wildest hopes. (*Russell Stannard, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the OU*)*

The uncertainty of the early years is captured in Tam Dalyell's obituary to Professor Mike Penz, (a South African, socialist and anti apartheid activist), the first Dean of Science at the OU.

> *'In 1970, when there were only some 300 members of the staff at Walton Hall, most of them knew that, unless the university was "airborne" within a year, a change of government might mean that it would never take off. For Mike, this meant working from early morning till late at night six or seven days a week. He was one of the first to realise the essentially hybrid nature of the OU (part academic, part industrial) and all the implications of that fact. This was probably because his previous training and experience was as a physicist and engineer. He understood that planning, scheduling, establishing production norms (however alien they might seem to normal academic life) were essential if the primary aim of the OU - to produce effective, academically viable, distance-learning courses - was to be achieved.' (*Dalyell 1995*)*

These social values of openness and access were held by other academics like Professor Doreen Massey who joined the OU later. Massey, a radical geographer, feminist, theorist and political activist was admired worldwide for her work on space, place and power and came to the UKOU in 1982. She was

fiercely committed to the OU's principles and remained at the OU for the rest of her career.

> *'Her academic base was the Open University to which she was strongly loyal because of its openness and accessibility to all who wanted to learn. She turned down professorships from elsewhere, including from Oxford, which she considered too exclusive and elitist for her far-reaching educational mission.'* (Wainwright 2016*)*

These ideals and appreciation of how to realise them inspired many of the distance education developments across the world – e.g. the vision of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), whose establishing expert committee was made up of many of the founders of the UK OU, and whose vision was that it should address the needs of the Commonwealth for education and training using distance education and thereby extending access to quality education to remote regions, and to people with limited or no face-to-face learning options. Thus, Asa Briggs who was also the first Chancellor of the UK Open University, wrote in the forward to 'Open and Distance Learning in the Developing World',

> *'The idea of carrying distance learning to the third world carried with it sense of moral as well as organisational challenge. The key word for me was access.'* (Perraton 1999*)*

Moreover, distance education by providing access, challenged the assumption that education, especially university education, was a scarce resource that must be limited to those who are most qualified (Tight, M 1991). For years the most critical qualitative measure of a university's excellence was how few of its students' passed.   And still the relative achievement profile of each year's intake, in comparison to competitors, is a sign of a university's rank. Opponents of open universities argued for exclusivity – seeing that opening up access

would be admitting 'intellectual hoboes'. (Hutchins of Chicago University opposing the intake of World War 11 veterans (Hall 2003 p.9).[6]

The particular characteristic of distance education methodology that enabled it uniquely to address mass exclusion from formal education, is that the the curriculum and learning resources, (e.g. the lectures of conventional teaching - the curriculum), can be created by one set of specialists and support of learners by another - e.g. the tutors and administrators. It is this division of labour that has led some theorists to describe distance education as an industrialised form of provision as opposed to the craft industry methodologies of conventional university provision (Sewart 1988). Economies of scale can be achieved by the multiple use of the learning resources bringing down the unit cost of these resources. (Perraton 2000 & 2004 Rumble 1997). A common error of governments and institutions is to assume that this makes distance education cheap, where in reality resources (human and financial) are used differently. Tutoring and student support is not an insignificant cost but frequently it is ignored by institutional leaders. In reality learning support and tutoring is as important to the model as the resources themselves - as there is no presumption that students need be isolated learners or autodidacts. Students had to be supported and receive feedback on their work to make access meaningful. Being able to recruit and if necessary train tutors as Elliott (1978) noted was critical to the model - '*an open door could not be a revolving door*'[7] as many in the UK Open University were fond of saying. Student support was central to the model - facilitating and encouraging student learning including educational guidance. Thus in the opening chapter of *Open Teaching,* a booklet produced as part of the induction and staff development of part time UK OU tutors, the staff development team wrote:

> *The Open University values its tutorial and counselling staff. The*
> *high standards and reputation of the university are the product*

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[6] This is not to say that distance education universities are all open – often the same entry requirements as campus provision apply.

[7] The provenance of this saying is unknown to me but was frequently said when UKOU staff discussed the need for student centredness and support.

not only of the quality of its teaching materials but also the excellence of its tutorial and counselling staff. This excellence does not simply come from your academic ability and competence. It is due to your belief in the importance of education and the philosophy and ideals of the OU. OU tutors and counsellors are renowned for their commitment to their work. …. We can assume that you will bring to the OU a commitment to the teaching and learning of adult students.' (The Open University 1988)

The Open University employed many thousands of part time tutors (seven and a half thousand when *Open Teaching[8]* was written) and whilst the very strength of the UK OU tutorial team was its diversity many of those employed worked full time in campus universities and were attracted to, and influenced by, the philosophy and values the UK OU espoused and practised, as a number of interviewees in this research attested to.

The philosophy of accessibility required that the methods and technologies should enhance, not limit, accessibility and that the starting point for all teaching was the learner. This represented a marked change from conventional university teaching which was teacher centric as opposed to learner centric. The concept of learner-centredness is a complex concept in that it enshrines the goal of providing education that prioritises learner needs rather than institutional convenience and enables learners to pursue their studies in a way that is appropriate and sufficiently flexible for their circumstances. The interpretation of flexibility can range from full individualisation to more constrained programming for example in the order of modules studied or the pace of study. In this research flexibility was a critical concept interviewees stressed.

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[8] Background papers for the OU staff development team 1986 - 1988. Helen Lentell Chair of Staff Development Team.

UK Campus Provision

In recent years the number of distance education courses offered by campus universities in the UK has increased. These provisions challenge the presumptions of scale as the courses tend to have far fewer students than conventional distance education. They also question the simple interpretation of a distance education division of labour inherent in the dominant model as course writers are invariably involved in course presentation. However the campus provision of this study is clearly distance education since teaching and learning is taking place without the teacher and learner meeting face to face.

Desk research undertaken by the Department for Continuing Education, at the University of Oxford for HEFCE to advise the Online Learning Task Force, found that of 308 UK HE and FE institutions; 113 of these institutions (37 per cent) were found to offer one or more Distance/online course with 1,528 courses delivered by distance and or online learning (White et al 2010). A search of 'The Distance Education Portal' indicated that in 2015 there were 1,665 Distance Learning Degrees offered by UK universities which were entirely on-line. However as Bates (2015) has observed there are serious issues with the methodology and reliability of the data collected – e.g. campus based modules within on campus programmes being described as distance education which might better be described as blended or hybrid courses.

Whilst aggregated data on the numbers of distance education courses and students may not be accurate the Complete Universities Guide, which gives information for each university in the UK, reveals that many campus universities describe part of their course offering as distance education (See Complete Universities Guide 2015/16). Most universities offering distance education courses do so at postgraduate level, thus: the University of Nottingham (33,270 students enrolled in the academic year 2013/14) reports having 360 students studying by distance education, all at post taught graduate level, in nine areas of study; and Loughborough University (15,965 students enrolled in the academic year 2013/14) reports 455 students, all at taught post graduate level in 6 areas of study. The University of Leicester (16,750 students enrolled in the

academic year 2013/14) and describing itself as 'one of the biggest suppliers of higher education distance learning courses in the UK' (Complete Universities Guide 2015/16) reports that 1,635 students are distance education students. Again most are taught post graduate students; although Archaeology reports 235 distance students as undergraduate and 25 as taught post graduate. Leicester reports that 35% of its total enrolments are at post graduate level – which suggests that distance education is a significant activity at post graduate level at Leicester. Although an internal marketing paper from Leicester produced for the School of Management (2013) suggests that the trend from 2007 onwards – particularly on the MBA programme – is downwards. Anglia Ruskin University (20,700 students enrolled in the academic year 2013/14) atypically reports 625 distance education students at undergraduate level with 40 at postgraduate level. However almost all the distance education undergraduate students at Anglia Ruskin study programmes in ophthalmic and aural and oral sciences. And this specialised vocational provision at undergraduate level appears to be the case with a number of the new universities.

More recently it has been reported (Contact North 2017) in a briefing on a publication yet to be released that in 'developed countries'

1. *Online and distance education enrolments are strong and mainly growing*
2. *Existing institutions are increasing their online and distance education offerings*
3. *New institutions are offering online and distance education*
4. *Distance education is an integral part of higher education*
5. *DE is accepted as mainstream in developed countries.*

The report goes on to state

'In the United Kingdom, there are now so many universities offering on-line and distance education that government data

has not yet caught up to track enrolments in on line and distance

education in these institutions.' (Contact North 2017)

What actually distinguishes distance and on-line courses in the report is undefined. But this reported increase in distance education courses offered by campus universities should not be a surprise, even taking into account the definitional problems Bates has raised, for governments have been keen for a long time to increase flexible ways of learning. '*Students are crying out for more flexible courses and modes of study which they can fit around work and life*' the University's Minister Jo Johnson is quoted as saying in the Guardian (February 24th 2017). In addition, as has been suggested by the entrepreneurial development of early distance education provision, universities may well be keen on distance education because they perceive that it can provide significant income to the providing institution. That is it assists in the commodification of higher education (see e.g. Readings 1997). Whether or not one can infer from these increases that distance education is, or is on the way, to being mainstreamed, as the Contact North report suggests, is highly dubious as will be seen in this thesis.

Summary

In this very brief history of distance education what emerges is that distance education has been, in various forms, around for a long time. Critically it arose as a methodology that addressed issues of access to education. Indeed Bullen has argued that the dominant discourse and objective of distance educators up to the turn of the present century

'was essentially about access: trying to reach the under-served

populations and the second chance and non-traditional learners

and helping developing countries educate large numbers of

learners with limited resources'. Bullen (2014)

Access was seen by the advocates for distance education as a good and valuable thing to achieve. And this philosophical orientation of distance

educators was so even when distance education was provided by providers who were seeking to profit from it - for example Pitman. Highlighting the deep roots of this core value and critical objective of distance education enables a deeper understanding. This thesis will argue of how distance education came about and continues in campus universities through the agency of the distance education workers who are intensely committed to achieving access goals for their students. When it becomes difficult or impossible to achieve this objective undesirable consequences follow for the continuance of distance education provision in campus universities.

Another aspect of the history of distance education is the use of technology to enable study off campus. Recently, technology, as the next chapter recounts, has arisen as a critical, and for many, a defining feature in distance education, and has led some writers to claim that distance education '*is less a philosophy and more a method of education*' (Bates 2008). That is a focus on technology downplays the values of distance educators. Whilst these two positions (philosophy and methodology) are not inherently in contradiction in practice they may well be. Indeed as the next chapter suggests, the focus on the usage of technology, specifically digital technology, within education has changed the focus and concerns of the distance education literature. There has been a discourse turn. Thus one interviewee drawing attention to the different discourses surrounding distance education and on-line education observed that whilst her course was undoubtedly a distance education course, which was created to enable access, when they referred to it in the wider university they downplayed access and talked about on-line delivery since they had discovered that this term was more acceptable, and delivered better outcomes for them. Senior management, she observed, perceived the university was 'behind' on all things digital - '*so there has been a bit of a rush to catch up*' (MK academic University B).

This thesis is essentially seeking to understand how distance education came to be in UK campus universities and how it has been sustained. The history of distance education illustrates the importance and enduring commitment of these

values that early practitioners considered underpinned the practice of distance education. Whilst there has been a discourse turn within distance education writing, as the next chapter demonstrates, for those who strive to enable students to study at a distance in campus universities, those this thesis describes as the distance education workers, these values are deeply embedded within them and their practice. Indeed what might be defined as the distance education habitus emerged as the key defining characteristic of their practice. This thesis argues it is this that is critical to understanding the emergence and continuance of distance education in campus universities.

Chapter 3 What Distance Educators Say about Distance Education: A Literature Review.

This chapter examines the literature on distance education to consider how it might offer an insight into the development and maintenance of distance education in campus universities. The previous chapter on the history of distance education referred to Bullen's claim that philosophical concerns about access have underpinned earlier discourses on distance education. And this was certainly the backdrop to the post second world war literature on distance education with concerns about student-centredness rooted in concerns to ensure access did not lead to a 'revolving door' for disadvantaged students.

The first part of this chapter examines two dominant but contradictory themes in the literature. On the one hand there is the approach that addresses the institutional requirements for successful distance education. This literature suggests that distance education was very unlikely to emerge, let alone be sustained and succeed, in the absence of appropriate, i.e. student-centred distance education policy, systems and processes. Additionally some writers focused on the economies of scale seen as critical to successful distance education. Most were directing their attention to governments and institutional leaders - since it was felt successful distance education would address many of the critical education and training issues governments in both developing and developed countries faced, and which required high level leadership to own and champion it. This perspective draws attention to the differences between face to face and distance education. The second strand within the literature, emerging in the later years of the twentieth century, suggests a different focus. Namely that distance education methodology is becoming mainstreamed owing to the wide scale adoption of learning technologies for on and off campus study. This will, it is argued, inevitably lead to the convergence of the two modes - face to face provision and distance education. The convergence thesis can be described as technologically determinist - technology is driving the perceived change. Although some of this literature is more nuanced, identifying the affordances of technology by highlighting the external factors within which

universities operate and which encourage technology take-up, and thereby leading to the mainstreaming of distance education. In recent years learning technologies have taken centre stage in the literature over and above the focus on students and their needs when studying off campus. The final part of the chapter reports on a number of campus based distance education case studies including a research project on university policies pertaining to distance education, and case studies which describe some of the issues around the introduction and practice of distance education in campus universities. The implication of which is to suggest that explaining the emergence and continuance of distance education in campus universities is more complex than one might assume from the more prominent distance education literature. That is to say neither establishing the distance education systems and processes - however learner centred - nor technology applied to learning will ensure the emergence and continuance of distance education in campus universities. What this case study literature hints at is the possibility that it is the distance education workers who are committed to distance education who make it happen regardless of the presence or absence of a distance education infra structure. Indeed this is what emerged during the research as critical to the successful implementation and maintenance of distance education in campus universities.

The Literature of Difference

Holmberg has drawn attention to the early establishment of associations of correspondence educators and providers who came together to learn from one another and to study their practice (Holmberg 2005 p.20). And it was undoubtedly through defining what distance education was and writing about their practice that the view among distance educators grew, and became entrenched, that emphasised the distinctiveness of distance education from campus based provision. It was essentially different in kind. Moreover creating and running distance education institutions focused attention to the project of making the enterprise succeed – what had to be in place to make it work. Clearly this would not be bricks and mortar classrooms. Discussion and analysis about distance education became focused on its technical form and

methodology which when identified and codified drew attention to the way distance education differed from face to face education. Indeed Daniel noted at the time that the effect was '*almost to the point of declaring its study to be a new academic discipline*' Daniel (1988 p.58). These views on the difference were held even in Australia where an 'integrated mode' of distance education was practiced.

> '*In the 'integrated mode' a lecturer is given responsibility both for a group of conventional, on-campus students and for a group of distance education students…learning materials are usually developed in close parallel with the lecturer's lecture room course and the same assignments and examinations are provided for both on campus and external students.*' (Keegan 1984 p.11-12)

The basic definition of distance education – the separation of the teacher and learner – is uncontentious and applies whether the provision is primarily print based, audio/radio based, video/television based, satellite based, or internet based – or any combination of these technologies. And this differentiates distance education from all forms of conventional face to face provision. Beneath this obvious difference are layers of complexity (Lentell 2004) which are essentially, but inadequately, described as pedagogy and student support; communication – not least facilitating communication between students and the providing institution; designing and delivering courses, organisational systems and structures; technology; management (of systems, processes and people), and audit, research and quality assurance. In conventional teaching many of these tasks would be conducted by the teacher/lecturer but in distance education the tasks of teaching and administration are carried out by many – in effect there is a division of labour. And if distance education is to work and also be sustainable this division of labour requires careful planning and managing. (Perraton and Lentell 2004 and Hope and Guiton (2006).

One of the most influential writers in the field was Otto Peters whose original work was published in German in 1967 and translated into English and

published as 'Distance Teaching and Industrial production: A Comparative Interpretation in Outline' (Peters 1983). Peters, who has substantially revised his thesis in light of new digital technologies (Peters 2003), argued that 'distance study is a form of study complementary to our industrial and technological age' (Peters 1983 p. 95). Peters' thesis was that Distance education is the application of industrial techniques for greater access in the delivery of instruction and that if these methods are not used distance education will not be successful and the distance education project for mass access will not be achieved. These techniques include: systematic planning, specialisation of the workforce, mass production of materials, automation, standardisation, and quality control plus the harnessing of modern communication technologies. The application of industrial practices results in high quality with the high cost amortised by large student numbers – i.e. economies of scale. This approach was broadly supported by theorists working on the costs of distance education (e.g. Rumble 1997). And Sewart captured this by noting that distance education

> *'is a complex process which requires activities which are different from and often additional to the conventional teaching operations in Higher Education. It involves inter alia a variety of skills more commonly associated with the work force of manufacturing and service industries ... It also requires coordination of inputs provided by a number of specialists. In fact it represents an industrialised form of teaching, drawing on practices in manufacturing as well as service industries, and operating on a division of labour' (Sewart 2010).*

The kind of departmental distance education that evolved in UK campus based universities were seen from this point of view as 'cottage industries', which were potentially both economically unviable, because of relatively small student numbers, and fundamentally unsustainable, because of their reliance on a small number of academic staff who might at any moment move on or take study leave (see Rumble 1997 and Sewart 2010).

Moore and Kearsley, in bringing a systems perspective to the explanation of how distance education works, stress the role of the whole institution in

integrating the different components of distance education. They argued that the distance education system is not a series of separate components, such as e.g. course design, development and maintenance; course delivery (recruitment, teaching and student support); course management, administration and policy; quality control etc. but a system of planned components that function together within '*special organisational and administrative arrangements*' (Moore and Kearsley 1996 p. 2). This focus on the integration of the totality of arrangements made for distance education students studying off campus suggests that the components need to be managed to ensure integration, coherence, and efficiency. Importantly, in this sense rather than an individual teacher or lecturer being responsible for teaching – the whole institution is teaching.

King (2012) agreeing with the need for high level institutional planning, and writing from the experience in Australia, notes that this does not imply one model of doing distance education, rather there are many kinds of dual mode provision and they vary considerably

> *'from having a stand-alone distance education unit that manages all functions, including teaching and assessment, through to a highly integrated approach that seeks to minimise the distinctions and arrangements occurring between categories of student'* (King 2012 p. 10)

The focus on organisation and systems emphasises the differences between campus and distance provision and stressed the need for policy and planning - both for institutions and governments. Naidoo notes that one

> *'of the key factors in the successful delivery of quality education programmes in the distance mode is the creation of an enabling policy environment that promotes the implementation of open learning and distance education and allocates the appropriate financial and human resources' (Naidoo 2006 p.7).*

This perspective was promoted by an early 'Knowledge Series' advisory booklet from The Commonwealth of Learning which noted that an

*'institution ... must take into account that distance education is different from on-campus education in the way it is taught, how the materials are delivered to learners, and how the students actually learn and interact with their teachers/facilitators and each other. An institution's policy makers must also consider how distance education policy is influenced and partly shaped by state and national policies, new technologies, accreditation requirements, institutional legislation and existing internal policies and procedures' (*Bottomley and Calvert 2003*).*

Underlying this quotation is the recognition that not only are distance education students different from campus based students but they are often international students studying in their home countries – with very different cultural and educational experiences. Teaching in face to face environments teachers can expect fairly homogeneous groups despite the recruitment of large numbers of overseas students.

Guiton in commenting on the introduction of distance education initiatives – including ones within a conventional face to face institution – identifies that the

*'separation of learners from teachers or facilitators requires mediation involving carefully structured and predictable processes' (*Guiton 2006 p. 92).

That it might be difficult to retro-fit distance education policies and systems into traditional universities where departments developed distance education programmes, i.e. they were bottom up developments, was suggested by Peters when he noted that 'virtual distance teaching universities' (Peters 2003 p.191) usually are universities within universities. And

*'because they are outgrowths of traditional universities they have to deal and come to terms with fixed academic structures and conventions which are normally resistant to change and restrict flexibility' (*Peters 2003 p. 192*).'*

Guiton observed that the

'range and complexity of operational structures …can make its realisation problematic.   In those institutions which serve both distant and attending students there is an ever present danger that 'out of sight 'can mean 'out of mind' unless clear academic management structures exist to prevent it' (Guiton 2006 p. 109*).*

The emphasis on the organisational requirements and management of systems for distance education might suggest an incompatibility with conventional campus provision in that distance education is fundamentally about teaching and learning requiring organisational direction and operational systems to achieve this. Campus universities would identify teaching and learning as only one aspect of their mission.

For Guiton, and many distance education writers, whilst recognising that distance education is an 'industrial' process, it is learner centredness that is the integrating focus for operational systems. This is in distinction to the more process-oriented and task focused meaning operational systems arguably have in typical business organisations – marketing, registration, invoicing, etc. are tasks to be completed and can be achieved regardless of knowing or caring who the 'customers' are. Indeed Mills, in reporting a private conversation with the founding Vice Chancellor of the British Open University, noted that he said

'… studying at a distance was the most difficult way to study yet invented' and that it therefore follows *'that distance education institutions and their staff took particular concern to support students … and be on their side'* (Mills 2004 p. 31)*.*

Recognising the particular problems for students studying at a distance many writers have stressed that learning centredness is/has to be a critical feature of distance education – tailoring all aspects of provision to the students and their needs. This can principally be seen in the writing of those concerned with course design, tutoring and student support (See e.g. Freeman 2004; O'Rourke (2003); Lentell (2003); Murphy (2000); Lockwood, 1994; Romiszowksi (1981).

Indeed the philosophical roots of distance education pedagogy draw extensively on humanist learning theory and andragogy (see e.g. Knowles 1989) with its concern and focus on active learning as opposed to teaching, and with an integrated approach that includes cognitive, affective and psychomotor activities to support learning, as well as recognition of the powerful impact of context and experience on the learning of adults. The early forms of correspondence education, described in chapter one, provided personalised tutor feedback and support or a 'guided didactic conversation[9]' (Holmberg 1960) between the tutor and the student long before more conventional universities concerned themselves with student learning as opposed to the transfer of knowledge.

It might seem counter intuitive that 'industrialised' distance education, demonstrated e.g. by the mass production of learning materials and a complex division of labour in delivering programmes, should be concerned with knowing and understanding who the students are and with communicating with them as individuals. A common sense understanding might place the emphasis on the 'Fordist'[10] nature of distance education mass producing uniform, highly structured materials and utilising them many times with many groups of students and thereby reducing unit costs – as indeed it does. This was an ever present danger for distance education provision for as Mills (2003) cautioned an emphasis on the mass production of materials diverts focus from the student–teacher interaction implied in Holmberg's didactic conversation, and identifies

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[9]The term didactic gives the impression of a one way monologue. This confusion arises through translation from German to English.

[10] In the 1990s the distance education community debated Fordism and the supposed de-skilling of academic staff with its division of labour and increased involvement of administrative and management staff and the use of part time tutors. (See e.g. Campion and Renner (1992).

academic teaching only occurring in course materials rather than equally occurring when tutors facilitate learning and give feedback.[11]

Against the 'Fordist' criticism of distance education many writing in the field argued that the discipline of instructional design[12] and the development of personalised student support services militated against ignoring individual students. Thus Freeman, discussing the instructional design process of distance education where the learner of necessity must take centre stage, made the point that

> *'in classroom-based teaching, the basic resource is the teacher. He or she may use other resources such as textbooks or audio-visual aids, but the teacher remains the central component of the system. He or she performs many functions. He or she: defines what is to be learnt; provides information; gives examples; explains; questions; sets learning tasks, both for individuals and groups; marks work; answers learners' questions; checks what learners have learnt; provides feedback to individual learners on their progress; provides other resources (e.g. textbooks), gives advice on how to use those resources; gives study advice; and helps with individual problems. In distance learning there is no teacher. The teacher is replaced by a combination of learning materials and tutors....This means that the learning materials have to carry out all of the 14 tasks*

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[11]In the previous chapter it was noted that from 1858 the the University of London (External Division) opened its degrees to any male student regardless of their location. That is it registered and examined male students thus enabling them to graduate. It was an examining body of the University of London and as such did not teach students. Before October 1920 women were not allowed to graduate. Thus whilst women from the late 1870s had attended lectures of the University, taken examinations, and had gained honours in those examinations they were not allowed to graduate. As an examining body the University of London provided the students with little more than a syllabus and reading list. Failure rates were not surprisingly very high as it required tremendous application and diligence to succeed. It was from this that distance educators recognised the need for student support and many separate commercial services developed to support registered University of London students - including what is now The National Extension College.

[12] 'Instructional design is the systematic development of instructional specifications using learning and instructional theory to ensure the quality of the instruction. It is the entire process of analysis of learning needs and the goals and the development of a delivery system to meet those needs. It includes development of instructional materials and activities; and tryout and evaluation of all instruction and learner activities.'(Pennsylvania State University quoted in Freeman 2004 p. 2-3)

above except mark[13] work. In other words the learning materials
themselves will define what is to be learnt, provide information,
give examples and so on' (Freeman 2004 p.3-4).

Getting this right for paper based or on-line provision depends on careful planning, understanding the intended students' profiles and their context and getting all aspects of the course right. A long term and more complex project compared to the conventional classroom teacher who is able to prepare, if necessary the night before, and can rely on classroom observation to adapt and amend as circumstances require – a strategy not available to distance education. Getting the course right therefore entails significant up-front costs (Rumble 1997).

Sewart (1993) also argues that the methodology of distance education enables the mass provision of education both in developed and developing countries where there simply is not sufficient resources to provide educational opportunities for all. And like Peters he likens this to 'industrial' provision. However he cautions that this on its own will not provide the meaningful individual human contact which can be lost sight of with industrial methods when teaching becomes instruction and '*even indoctrination rather than education*' (Sewart 1993 p.6). One of the ways he argues distance education counters this is in the provision of student support services which he likens to a service industry – with the client always at the centre of the service. '*It is the interface between the institution and its students*' (Sewart 1993 p.11). These services – for instance giving guidance and advice, tutoring, responding to, and indeed anticipating, administrative and study queries - personalise the provision by being built up around the context of the student which will vary from country to country, the nature and purpose of the institution, the kind of course being offered, the needs of students and so on. That this is so can be seen in the many descriptions of student support services in different countries - see e.g.

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[13] A critical difference, and one not readily understood, between distance and conventional education is the role of assignments. Assignments are the main opportunity for the tutor to provide individual feedback to students – it is the primary location in distance education for teaching. Much confusion arises because this is sometimes described as marking which it also is.

Marchessou (2006), Nonyong (2006) and Tau (2006). For this is a provision driven by student need,

> '*no detailed prescription of student support services in general can be made. Each system must be derived rather from a number of principles*' (Sewart 1993 p.12).

One of these principles will (ought to) include providing 'sensitive and full commentaries/feedback on students' assignments' (Lentell 2003 p. 67), that is Homberg's didactic conversation. The UK Open University wrote of how skilful and student orientated this conversation has to be

> '*Often you (the tutor) will want to object to a point, to query the use or lack of evidence, to gloss an interpretation with a better one. In the mathematics-based subjects you may wish to demonstrate a neater proof, object to the wrong use of a result, point out the need to justify steps or show how an argument can be generalised to other situations. In conversation, these are natural and productive moves: the argument will proceed without rancour or offence because each party understands the other's mood and intention. The same words written down, however, have to bear by themselves the burden both of meaning and attitude. If they are read as abrupt, dismissive, harsh or, worst of all, humiliating they cannot effectively teach. The pain and anger caused will prevent the student from learning from them. All OU tutors have to develop a sensitivity to the feeling conveyed by their written language … '* (Open Teaching 1988 p.13).

The principles of student centredness in tutoring and providing feedback had to be in many cases learned and practised, and tutors required training and support to achieve this. Indeed Wildavsky (2016), director of higher education studies at the Rockefeller Institute of Government in New York, wrote an article entitled 'The Open University at 45: What can we learn from Britain's Distance Education Pioneer?', in which he identified a number of critical OU innovations,

but the one that he picked out as '*the OU's biggest accomplishment*' was '*combining scale with personalisation*'. He noted that

> '*…the OU model permits large numbers of students to maintain regular one-on-one contact with instructors online. Crucially, tutors provide detailed feedback on course assignments. For many students, particularly those who don't have a history of academic success and who are juggling multiple work and family responsibilities, this personal relationship with an instructor is key.*' Wildavsky (2016)

Simpson (2002, 2003 and 2013) has also argued that student support is an essential feature of distance education and is moreover a key issue in student retention. He argues ensuring effective student support is the moral responsibility of the providing institution if students are going to achieve their goals. But as Sewart (1993) and Mills (2006) have pointed out, student support does not come cheaply and is not straightforwardly open to audit in the way course materials and resources might be. As a consequence they are always in the frontline when resources get squeezed. Perhaps, as Lentell (2003) noted, this may well be because student services in distance education, are not immediately observable, are not easily bureaucratised and are little understood by those in senior positions with backgrounds in conventional provision. Rumble (2000), expressing a similar point, argued that the rationale for student services in distance education is not well based and theorised thus making the service vulnerable to pressures to reduce costs. In other words what Rumble and Lentell were arguing is that whilst distance education practitioners - especially those with student facing work like tutors/counsellors - knew what they did was important and impactful on student success, and whilst they shared their practice within their community, it was often little more than what one Senior Director of the UK Open University in many private conversations described as '*this is what we do here, repeated over and over again'.* That is to say practitioners knew what worked but this was not based on systematic study of practice or well theorised. This may be unfair and over stated since many of the practices of distance educators were based in the humanist practice of adult

education, as noted above. For example counsellors in the UK OU drew on the philosophies and theories of counselling and guidance (See contributions in Crawford, Edwards and Kidd 1998). But invariably this student centred tutoring and counselling aspect of distance education which so many from within this specific group of distance education practitioners saw as central, remained hidden within institutional practice and handbooks and thus hidden both from the wider world and the powerful senior managers of universities. Thus the quotation above on the feedback conversation has been reproduced from an Open University guide for tutors. It may be, as Rumble (2000) argued, that in order to protect student support services distance education should look to the theories relating to the service management sector. In the most recent edition of his book on supporting students, Simpson (2013) stresses the cost effectiveness and institutional benefit of various support activities. Thus Rumble and Simpson can be read as suggesting that in an era of managerialism student focused arguments for a service will not suffice. It has to be shown that it is cost efficient, as well as effective, to provide student support. Distance education practitioners have focused on the effectiveness.

The claim that distance education practice is inherently student-centred whilst campus provision is not would be a misreading. Rather, what distance education practitioners argued, is that in its very design, organisation and delivery learner centredness is integral to distance education. The recent concern about student experience for campus provision whilst an important marketing message, unlike with distance education, can be just a bolt on as Williams pointed out

> *'(The) higher education market has become increasingly competitive and students have become more demanding and better informed about what services and support they expect to receive whilst studying at university' …. but it is essentially a bolt on and with a focus on satisfaction,* (and is) *potentially damaging (*Williams 2015*).*

Technology has always been a critical feature of distance education. Indeed as noted earlier it was the introduction of cheap postal services that made possible

correspondence between a learner and a tutor and thus the beginning of distance education. Although Sewart et al (1984 p.1) note that the term distance education came into usage once the more 'advanced' audio and video technologies became available. It has become increasingly widespread to define distance education in terms of the evolution of technology. Thus Taylor (1995) identified four and then five, generations of distance education (Taylor 2001). First there was the Correspondence Model, based on print technology. Second generation - the Multi Media Model – was based on print, audio and video technologies. Third generation was the Telelearning Model based on applications of telecommunications technologies to provide synchronous communication and fourth generation he defined as the Flexible Learning Model based on online delivery via the internet. The fifth generation: Intelligent Flexible Learning Model is 'essentially a derivation of the fourth generation, which aims to capitalise on the features of the internet and the web' (Taylor 2001 p.2.)

The progression through these stages has been driven, Taylor argued, mainly by changes in technology and their application in educational contexts. Useful though such a classification may be the situation on the ground is inevitably much more complex, with institutions using a combination of technologies. Nevertheless there is a strong level of agreement that the improved affordances technology provides enables interactivity – including student to student as well as student to institution – is an improvement on earlier models of distance education.

> *'Web-based learning offers a better opportunity to achieve academic goals such as creative and critical thinking, knowledge construction, problem solving, and collaborative learning than print-based distance education'* (Bates 2008 p. 225).

The pedagogical benefits of technology in distance education are only one set of variables – for as instructional designers Mayes and Freitas (2004) argued – many of the decisions taken in distance education course design depend on

pragmatic decisions like access to technology, costs[14], technical support and quality assurance. Bates (2005), whilst recognising the pedagogical benefits of technology, maintained that the critical success factor for the use of technology rests on organisational and management issues. These he argued influence and impact the effective use of technology in any educational context but especially distance education. So whilst distance education does utilise technology, and has done so from its inception, the argument that identifies this as a primary factor in understanding the difference between the two modes is overstated. Indeed, as has been noted, the founders of the UK OU did not accept the title 'The University of the Air' preferring to focus on the vision for the OU rather than its methodology.

The strong arguments for identifying the differences between the two modes address distance education's requirement for planned and integrated organisation which has embedded learner centredness at its heart. Thus whilst distance education utilises appropriate technology from this perspective it is not the defining feature. Rather, what is seen as critical for distance education success, are learner-centred systems and processes. Without this, distance education would, it would seem, be unlikely to develop or be sustained in UK campus universities. However as has been reported in the previous chapter there is substantial evidence to suggest that distance education provision is growing in UK campus based universities. And it is the application of technology that is most frequently cited as the key driver for this development and the perceived convergence and mainstreaming of the two modes of educational provision.

The Literature of Convergence and Mainstreaming

The term 'mainstreaming' is used to capture the assumed re-positioning of distance education within traditional campus based universities. In distance education mainstreaming is said to reflect the process of seamlessly integrating

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[14] The core drivers of costs in distance education have been identified as planning, development, delivery, learner support, student numbers - a mixture of fixed and variable costs. (Rumble 1997) And it would be unwise to develop a distance education programme where potential students did not have access to the technology used. And interestingly this, many of my interviewees at University C, felt the senior management was pushing them to do with the acceptance of short term project money from bodies like JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee).

distance education into conventional campus provision (Thompson 1999). Thus Moran and Myringer start their chapter in 'Higher Education Through Open and Distance Education' (Harry 1999) by noting:

> '*In the last years, distance education has moved from the margins to the mainstream of higher education policy and practice in many countries, accompanied by a spectacular growth in programmes, institutions and enrolments*' (Moran and Myringer 1999 p.57).

Whilst others might not make such a bold claim they would argue that there is a trend towards convergence. Thus Ryan, although referencing the United States and Australia who are leading this trend, concludes

> '*It seems clear … that the "borders" between distance and on-campus education are diminishing. Convergence of modes of delivery proceeds apace, while increasing numbers of notionally on-campus students …. (are) enrolling in "flexible" or "distance"/ off –campus/on-line programmes. Students appreciate the convenience of on-line resources that can be accessed around their working and social lives and are showing a declining preference for traditional face-to-face delivery*' (Ryan 2008 p. 759).

Rapid technological developments have been seen as the key driver of these changes in distance education. And since there has always been a symbiotic relationship between distance education and technology - with technology providing a tool to enable and enhance the learning experience of distance education students – perhaps it is not surprising that, as Bates noted,

> '*online learning, e-learning, learning technologies, educational technologies, digital learning, or whatever you call it or them … continue to grow, become more prevalent, and more a central part of teaching and learning in higher education e-learning and*

distance education began to look like and be treated as though they were one and the same.' (Bates 2012)

Ryan observed the replication in

'*numerous journals of distance education, this focus on new technologies has reinforced the linkage of 'distance' with 'online' learning'* (Ryan 2008p.749)

Books with titles like 'Distance and E-Learning in Transition: Learning Innovation, Technology and Social Challenges '(Bernath et al 2009) were published, and in 2011 'Open Learning: the journal of open and distance learning' became 'Open Learning: the journal of open, distance and e-learning' thus reinforcing the view that e-learning was distance education.

Bates defined e-learning as

'*all computer and Internet-based activities that support teaching and learning – both on-campus and at a distance ….comes in different forms, ranging from classroom aids to fully online learning … (and) includes administrative as well as academic uses of information and communication technologies that support learning, such as software that provides links between student data bases and teaching, for example, class lists, e-mail addresses, etc.'* (Bates 2008).

From this definition of e-learning it is difficult to distinguish what the difference between e-learning and distance education might be. And as Tait observed

'*many (campus based) students now use the web to search for resources, communicate at least in part with their teachers by e mail and do not need to spend so much time on campus and indeed as many have to work so substantially to keep themselves during full-time study they cannot actually spend so much time on campus'* (Tait 2008 p.501).

Thus by the use of the same technologies distance education and conventional education are seen to be converging.

A key aspect of the perceived convergence and mainstreaming is that on-line technologies are the catalyst not only for the mainstreaming of distance education but for new models of higher education. Evans and Nation as early as 1993 provide a description of the forces that are driving the convergence between distance and on campus teaching methods – not least among which is the perceived weakness of on-campus teaching and the lack of independence of the on campus students. Lifelong learning, not helped by dependence on lecturers, could be furthered by the use of technologies, it was assumed, because it encourages greater autonomy and independence. A criticism of distance education in earlier years thus became a benefit! Indeed over the past several years, there has been a shift in the perception of online learning to the point where it is seen as

> *'a viable alternative to some forms of face to face learning. The value that online learning offers is now well understood, with flexibility, ease of access, and the integration of sophisticated multimedia and technologies chief among the list of appeals … (higher) education continues to move away from traditional lecture based programming' (*NMC 2015 p.1*).*

On the same theme, King (2012) noted that many dual mode institutions in Australia were seeking to move to a highly integrated model as they move from providing distance education for some students to more flexible delivery for all. This is a process that is sometimes called blended or flexible delivery and a core element of the mainstreaming thesis. The 'flipped classroom' (Abeysekera et al 2015) a form of blended learning, is an instructional strategy that directly mimics distance education methodology by delivering content online, that is outside of the classroom, whilst moving learning activities that might have been homework in the past, into the classroom (see Open University 1988). King (2012) quotes Bradley, an advisor to the Australian government and one time

Vice Chancellor of The University of South Australia, a dual mode university, as saying the days of dual mode provision were over and the future of distance education would be incorporated in providing flexible options for all. Following the same trend the EU set up a working group to make recommendations for the modernisation of higher education so that universities might be encouraged to accelerate development of comprehensive strategies for the adoption of new modes of learning and teaching, (See 2014 European Commission). And the British government as early as the start of 2000 invested 62 million pounds in the UK E-Universities (UKeU) which was intended to offer a strong brand, an advanced e-learning platform and a centralised recruitment centre for distance learning programmes across the UK. Ultimately UKeU was not successful.

The lack of precise terminology is confusing with terms such as open learning, flexible learning, distance learning, distributed learning, resource based learning, blended learning and e-learning being used interchangeably. There has been no universally accepted definition despite various attempts over the years to clarify terms – see e.g. Jeffries et al for an early attempt (Jeffries et al 1990). This is definitionally problematic since a small e-learning provision introduced by an individual academic to enhance their on campus teaching might not require significant institutional oversight or institutional change nor be concerned with the critical issues for distance education – e.g. robustness, replicability, student support etc. Pluciennik (2009), writing for an audience of fellow academics as opposed to educational technologists or distance education professionals, discussed his experience leading distance education in the Archaeology and Ancient History department at the University of Leicester. He noted the complete lack of consideration for the cost (including academic time) and lack of sustainability of such e-learning initiatives. He argued that institutional understanding and management itself had no grasp of

> *'the behind the scenes' requirements (structural changes, resources and staffing) for 'genuine, flexible, hybrid learning' (*Pluciennik 2009).

Pluciennik was writing during a time of unprecedented hype and what Winn (2015) has termed fetishising of technology, with financial incentives to experiment with e-learning. Pluciennik noted that considerable pressure was brought to bear on staff to undertake or join 'research' projects utilising new technology. Indeed this was often the only way it was possible to get the funding needed to implement and/or develop distance education provision. A short termism that itself led to many entirely predictable problems in presentation, as he reported. Not surprisingly this technologically driven approach has been challenged. For Moore

> 'teaching at a distance is to the classroom as the movie is to the stage play; there are basic similarities, but also different technologies, different skills, different economics, and different forms of organisation' (Moore 2009 p.405).

For Moore new learning technologies where they were applied in higher education had merely been grafted on to conventional campus provision – which had neither developed distance education nor used resources optimally. Moreover he argued to

> 'focus excessively on the technology is to focus only on the bottles and miss the chance of improving the wine' (Moore 2009 p.410).

From Moore's position e-learning may be a tool of distance education but e-learning is not distance education. For Moore introducing a new technology feature into a primarily campus university does nothing for developing flexible off campus provision. Moore is suggesting that for distance learning to have become mainstreamed would require major organisational change. In traditional universities and colleges, teachers are mostly unaware of all the complexities involved in running the university's interconnected components but

> 'in distance education, understanding how the entire system of course development and delivery occurs and how these

> *systems link to services and other components are vital aspects*
> *of ensuring effectiveness and quality'* (Davis 2004 p. 97-8).

Indeed Price and Kirkwood (2011) and Kirkwood (2014) have pointed to concerns regarding the quality of e-learning since frequently what is known about pedagogical planning and evaluation in the design of distance education courses is unknown or ignored by individuals implementing e-learning on their standard campus courses. Bates went so far as to say of those creating MOOCs (massive on line open courses) had committed the most

> *'egregious of errors in effective design through sheer ignorance*
> *of prior research in the area'* (Bates 2015).

The literature that focuses on technological determinism merging two modes of delivery has fast become a trope. Much can be seen as futurology - i.e. predictions about the future that have yet to come about. Indeed it could be argued with equal cogency that it was the the move to a credit based modular curriculum rather than the use of educational technologies that enabled distance education developments in campus universities. Modular curricula emphasise more explicit outcomes in relation to each part of the degree, rather than the more broadly traditionally defined course, and also have more entry and exit gates (See Betts and Smith 1998). Thus enabling the flexibility to step out of a programme with a recognised qualification, and re enter when appropriate, that adult distance education students need.

Technological determinism, by presenting a focus that sees only technologies (digital and virtual) as the basis of the new transformed university, is unable to represent the complexity of the university context. Moreover the over emphasis on technology presents an unproblematic account of changes taking place in contemporary universities. There is no recognition in the technologically determined literature of, for example, the new economy of higher education - what Slaughter and Leslie (1999) termed academic capitalism associated with new transnational educational markets and new forms of academic management.

Other explanations for what is happening to distance education in campus universities suggest a different approach taking in the wider context within which universities work. Thus Rumble in his seminal article 'The Competitive Vulnerability of Distance Teaching Universities' (Rumble 1992) argued that there would be an increasing number of UK campus based universities offering distance education programmes. He suggested that demographic and social changes had increased the part time student market and more and more campus based universities would take advantage of this. Rumble argued that campus based universities could and would exploit the advantages of marginal costs and hence develop courses more cheaply than e.g. the UK OU, whilst also providing a more varied distance education provision relevant to lifelong learners, business and the professions. Adopting distance education was thus for Rumble a business decision. Rumble, with considerable foresight, cautioned that campus based universities might lose '*competitive advantage*' if costs were inappropriately apportioned and universities failed to understand the cost drivers of distance education (different to face to face) and thus failed to put in place high level institutional and business planning to ensure efficient use of resources. This absence of understanding led, as interviewees at University C in particular reported, to charges on distance education departments that ultimately were to render their provision unviable. Moreover, one of the little understood drivers of higher costs, Rumble noted, was e-learning itself (Rumble 2012) since it would inevitably lead to increased unit and variable costs.

The Literature of and from Practice

The dominant themes from within the distance education literature examined, suggest that either distance education develops and is sustained on campus universities as a consequence of institutional strategies or by the affordances of technology. This is questioned by the research of Irele (2005), who has suggested, that rather than the emergence of distance education coming about as a consequence of high level senior management support, who would ensure that the processes and structures required were in place - that many thought was the sine qua non of success - the increase in distance education (with its commercial benefits) has arisen from within academic departments. They were

bottom up developments. This has happened, she argues, because courses are offered that are non-core, often with a professional development ethos, where departmental staff have more freedom to be '*entrepreneurial*' freed from the fetters of top down administration – a point Clark makes when referring to '*collective entrepreneurial action at these levels is at the heart of the transformation phenomenon*' within universities (1998 p. 4). Indeed the ability to increase departmental income, with the freedom it gives from the central administration, seems to have some (but not the only) bearing on the decision of departments in campus universities to undertake distance education. Thus e.g. Söderström et al (2012) describe the economic transformation of a department of education in a Swedish university, which had a small distance education offering, but by embracing on-line distance courses for part time, off campus students became primarily a distance education provider with a smaller face to face provision. The push to make these changes was primarily a reduction in full time enrolments in the latter years of the 20th century and the early part of 21st Century, competition from other providers, the imposition of outcome based government funding, and a decision to offer shorter courses. In addition the authors emphasise the pre-existing embedded departmental interest in distance education – the university served the sparsely populated northern part of Sweden - and suggest this commitment, plus retaining departmental control of the systems and technology, were critical for their success.

A similar situation is described by Duranton and Mason (2012) with the development of an MA in Translation at the University of Bristol. They describe a situation where the face to face post graduate numbers were declining making the on campus programme unsustainable. It was not the case that there was not a demand for their MA but rather student debt from undergraduate studies coupled with the flexibility of distance education determined that distance education was favoured by their potential and actual students, and their recruitment numbers demonstrated this. Duranton and Mason argued that whilst the learning technologies massively improved what could be provided for students on their distance education programme they were clear that the technology did not drive either the set up nor maintenance of their distance

education programme. Rather they emphasised the needs of their students and their wish to support them. They also praised the support they had from their department which

> *'developed a work load model that was different from the f-2-f model and reflected the impact of group sizes on student support. The need for dedicated high quality administrative support within the team was also recognised….The programme would have foundered without them' (*Duranton and Mason 2012 p. 86*).*

They also note that there is a limit to what a school or faculty can unilaterally achieve. Like other traditional UK universities

> *'Bristol does not yet have integrated, university-wide provision for key posts, notably instructional designers…Support services and regulatory frameworks are similarly geared towards the university's core business of f-2-f delivery and internationally distinguished research…..distance learning programmes are heavily dependent on good will and enthusiasm - their own and that of like-minded colleagues – and the results, however inspired and inspiring , are necessarily limited' (*Duranton and Mason 2012 p. 86*).*

These case studies indicate that it is the staff within academic departments who see a need for distance education and who make it work both educationally and financially. It is a bottom up development. Moreover Duration and Mason suggest that whilst they have departmental support, there is little indication of meaningful wider university support or understanding, let alone convergence and mainstreaming of distance education. The point Pluciennik (2009), quoted earlier in the chapter, was stressing when discussing the pressure to adopt new technologies however inappropriate they might be.

Mainstreaming when applied e.g. to gender equality within organisations presumes that gender equity is integrated into the mainstream operations and

organisational culture – incorporated into its DNA[15] - and involves, as Moore suggests, organisational change. Irele (2005) sought to examine the extent of mainstreaming in four land grant universities in the USA, and took mainstreaming to mean the tangible aspects of procedural changes in mainstream practice – (strategic and regulatory policies for instance) - and resource allocation both of which she argued would enable effective integration into the mainstream of a different population of students. The study also examined the more intangible aspects of mainstreaming – the psychological acceptance of distance education. Interestingly Irele found a lack of follow through between the strategic documents and the policy documents. Examining the strategic documents of universities from her research sites she reports that they all have a stated commitment to distance education in terms of increasing enrolments, and through these enrolments increasing revenue. As in the UK, distance education students were recognised as working adults, and thus different to traditional residential students, and who could because of this pay (large) tuition fees.   She also reports the policies and practices concerning study and students remained unchanged – as was reported by Duranton and Mason (2012) for Bristol. E.g. universities' policies on admission, Irele notes, remained unaltered and were

> *'not flexible enough to overcome logistical difficulties faced by distance education students. While having the same policies may be considered a strategy in favour of mainstreaming, the reality is that non-differentiated admission policies do not take into consideration the known profiles and problems faced by distance learners' (*Irele 2005 p. 12*).*

Indeed at one of Irele's research sites distance education students had to pay extra for the use of on-campus facilities – which was not the case for on campus students. Irele concluded that there may well be a convergence of

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[15] This is a common approach see for e.g. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

'the instructional components of distance education... this does not mean that distance education has achieved parity of esteem and acceptance by faculty or that it has been integrated as a system into traditional higher education' (Irele 2005.13).

Durham and See (2014), describing the set up and running of a distance learning Master's programme at the School of Geography at the University of Leeds, note 'the administrative nightmare of square pegs in round holes'. They note

'the existing student registration system (both in terms of software and of staff support) was not designed for distance learners or the intake of students four times per year. It was also not designed for transferring students to other institutions in the collaborative programme, accepting marks in the system from other institutions, or accepting back the students if they changed their mind about their specialisation in year 2. For full-time and part-time face-to-face students the student management system at Leeds has been designed to automate as many processes as possible. Systems hang off data bases – e.g. registration, counselling, dispatch - None of these processes worked very well for the distance learning programme. This means that most student records need to be updated manually and tracked very carefully. This imposes a considerable additional administrative burden on the Programme Director as well as the support staff in the School. The staff support issue has also been difficult, particularly in managing the four entry points. Trying to push through registrations in a timely manner for the three additional entry periods has proved to be challenging, yet it is this flexibility in intake points that has been crucial for ensuring adequate student numbers on the programme' (Durham and See 2014 p. 4).

They also describe the issues that arise when offering a programme that teaches '24 by 7 and 365 days a year'. This is counter cultural to the face to face university but is essential in distance education they argue. Distance learners they observe are much more isolated than their face-to-face counterparts so the tutor may be the only real point of contact at any given time, they are juggling work and family and need fast feedback –

> *'this interaction builds a very important trust/responsibility relationship between the tutor and the student. From our experience, distance learners value this relationship immensely so the amount of both academic tutoring and pastoral care is often much greater than for face-to-face teaching'* (Durham and See 2014 p.4-5).

This lack of flexibility for students and an administration system that does not easily accommodate the study needs of distance students would seem to belie claims for the convergence let alone mainstreaming of distance education.

Additionally many have pointed to the suspicion that academics in campus universities have about distance education. It does not enjoy, as Irele puts it, '*parity of esteem*'. Many in universities, as Walsh (2011) reports, associate distance education with 'dumbing down' and the associated reputational damage which could adversely impact on the ranking of their university were they to undertake it. It is '*the provenance of bottom feeding for-profits*' an observation Daniel Greenstein, the University of California's Vice Provost for academic planning, programs and coordination, made[16] (Walsh 2011 p. 257); a view that would not suggest mainstreaming. Some have argued that the commercialisation of distance education has diminished its philosophy of equity (Mingle and Hayward as cited in Ryan (2008 p. 759) whilst others might argue that its commercialisation represents a major conflict with widely held beliefs among university academics and administrators about the role of the university

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[16] It is not implied that this is a view he holds but rather it is the view he believes of many in the academy.

(Collini 2011) when the context for the adoption of distance education is profit[17] and the commodification of higher education.

Summary

It can be seen that the earlier literature from within the distance education field focuses on the macro level of the university. On the one hand it is argued that the absence of student centred systems, procedures, and processes required to make distance education work suggests distance education is unlikely to flourish in campus universities. In addition there is a presumption of size - large scale provision leading to reduced unit costs. Campus based distance education in the UK growing out of academic departments can hardly be compared with the large student numbers of single mode universities. On the other hand there is an alternative perspective which extrapolates from the adoption by campus universities of digital and virtual learning technologies and suggests that distance education is so prevalent that it is now mainstreamed. Oddly this literature does not appear to explore the wider application of technology to other aspects of how universities run themselves e.g. administration, libraries, teaching, communication which also have an impact on distance education provision. This is a rather odd lacuna especially in light of Robins and Webster's critique of both the '*futurological predictions*' being '*myths and ideology*' and the recognition that the transformations in higher education are far more complex than that captured by technological determinism (Robins and Webster's 2002 p. 3). Finally, and in marked distinction to the main distance education literature, there are case studies on departmental distance education course provision offered from within campus universities that are successful without changes to institutional structures and systems and nor are they integrated into other course offerings from within the academic department. These programmes have been provided for a number of years suggesting that they are more than a one off project.

Distance education within campus universities in the UK is growing according to both the universities themselves in their description of their courses (Complete

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[17] The University of Leicester VCAC paper (circa 2008) concentrated on the income to be derived from embarking on distance education - i.e. it was the only reason given.

Universities Guide 2015/16) and as reported by Contact North (2017). However there are major definitional problems with the use of the term distance education which is used to describe both learning technologies from within programmes offered on campus with full blown off campus distance education provision. This thesis is concerned with UK campus provision of distance education where students are registered as studying away from the campus. The foundational literature suggests this could not happen, or if it did would not survive. So how can the existence of distance education be explained? How did distance education come to be and how has it been sustained?

Clearly whilst systems and technology are important in themselves these cannot tell us much about the emergence and sustainability of distance education. In the accounts of the 'doing' of distance education reported in the case studies in this chapter some interesting potential lines of enquiry are hinted at - bottom up development, sympathetic departmental management, interest and commitment to the philosophy of distance education, collective team working, community of practice, overcoming with colleagues inflexible systems and an unsympathetic university culture, developing courses that departmental staff recognise students want but which they can not afford if studied full time on campus. Attentive to these ideas it was possible to hear reference to these in the interviews with the leader/experts, the first interviews undertaken for this research. As the research unfolded these themes offered greater insight into the understanding of the emergence and development of successful distance education in campus universities than the dominant approaches arising from within the formal distance education literature were able to provide. What became apparent in the research journey is that it was committed and proactive staff who made distance education happen. Staff who carried within themselves and shared with their fellow workers a commitment to what in the previous chapter is identified as the values of distance education: a desire to make the university accessible to more than those able to study full time. Distance education workers shared this ingrained disposition to make the university accessible and it guided their practice as distance education workers. This can be described as the distance education habitus. That is the unspoken aspects of the distance education culture that binds the distance education

workers together and which includes their collegial team working in a community of practice. In addition the Duranton and Mason (2012) and the Durham and See (2014) case studies indicate that distance education practice has always sat uncomfortably within the campus university and now more frequently collides with the creeping managerial practices that seek to run the university more efficiently by imposing generic management operations and processes on all course provision. This can be described as managerialism, an approach to management that believes that all organisations can be run on generic management practices. Experience and skills '*pertinent to an organisations core business are considered secondary*' (Klikauer 2015). Put simply, from a managerial perspective, there is little difference between the skills required to run a university or a distance education provision than the skills required to a run a chocolate factory or a bank. A cri de coeur of the distance education workers interviewed in the stage two interviews was precisely this: no one in management knew what they did or why they did it, but they were confident in their capability to reorganise the distance education provision without consultation with the distance education workers. A provision that the distance education workers had been built up over many years after long engagement with distance education practice.

The next chapter describes how the research journey unfolded. How the original question of the research - how distance education come about and has been sustained in campus universities - was originally located within the literature of structures, systems and processes of distance education but came to be refocused on the distance education workers themselves after the interviews with leader/experts. This focus on the distance education workers provided a more comprehensive lens of habitus and managerialism through which to understand the emergence, sustainability and possible demise of distance education in campus universities. Chapter 4 The Emerging Methodological strategy will give an explanation of the methodological approach used – an iterative process of ethnographically informed data generation, reflection and interpretation - alongside a discussion and justification for this approach. The chapter will explain the two - staged methodological journey of the thesis and how these research stages both reflected and informed the research process.

This is a meta discourse since it is my reflections on my thinking about the process of doing the research, in a field in which I have been professionally engaged all my working life. The chapter will describe the various stages of research gathering, including the questioning of the underlying ideas concerning distance education development in campus universities that had been assumed from the distance education literature. This assumption as seen in chapter three supposes that distance education requires for its development and maintenance an appropriate distance education infrastructure. After intense listening to the first stage interviews it was clear the actions of distance education workers may well offer greater insight and understanding into the emergence and sustainability of distance education in campus universities. Once this had been discerned in the first three interviews of stage one, it was possible to explore more deeply these emerging insights in the following seven interviews in stage one. This process, emergent findings from one interview feeding into subsequent interviews, was followed throughout the research process in stage two. This might be described as an ongoing conversational inquiry using the insights gained from preceding interviews, plus discernments from the literature of communities of practice and habitus, which I had become aware of during my research, to inform following interviews. An iterative process. The chapter also discusses the limitations and issues of the approach adopted. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical and inter related emotional considerations the research methodology raised in a context where I have had active involvement.

This chapter, unlike all the others, is written in the first person. This approach was unavoidable since at the core of my emerging understanding are my reflections on the research process itself. To write in the usual third person created linguistic contortions that made what I wanted to say incomprehensible.

Chapter 4 Explanation for the Methodological Approach

The thesis explores distance education in campus universities in the UK and is concerned with two interrelated questions: How did it come about and how is it sustained? The literature review on distance education examined in chapter three would suggest that distance education either could not be a sustainable activity in campus universities, or it would be absorbed into the mainstream as a flexible, e-learning provision for all students. Despite the confidence with which the mainstreaming thesis was promoted, it was my observation whilst working in one UK university and having knowledge of others, that these ideas of mainstreaming were pipe dreams. There was little or no evidence to substantiate the claim of mainstreaming distance education other than the observation that in many universities campus provision made use of some learning technologies to enhance their teaching.The mainstreaming argument was a prediction about the future based on extrapolating one dimension of distance education - the use of technology in university teaching - with little or no reference to, or comprehension of, the wider university. Thus the new technologies and digital applications became ends in themselves, superseding the wider goals of distance education described in chapter two of making university study accessible to those who could not study full time on campus. Moreover there seemed to be little evidence to suggest that distance education was valued in universities where it was offered. Perhaps few would go as far as saying '*the provenance of bottom feeding for-profits*' as was quoted in the previous chapter but it clearly was felt by many of the interviewees that distance education was not appreciated in their university - neither the distance education students, or the staff associated with it, or the model of educational provision geared to making the university accessible. It was a marginal activity which as Irele (2004) argued figured in high level strategic documents but lacked follow through in policies and practices that would make it happen on the ground.

I was deeply steeped in an understanding that the systems and processes of distance education were critical to maintaining distance education in all

contexts. I knew that distance education is a complex operation that needs management and coordination and systems that develop out of the study needs of adults who have full and demanding lives. Thus I had a presumption that if distance education was taking off in campus universities university leadership must play a part in this development. That is the leadership of the campus university, I expected, would be advocating for distance education at the very least and putting in place the enabling policies and processes that would make it function as described in the distance education literature. My starting hypothesis was that where distance education was recruiting students and student numbers were growing management must have advanced this by ensuring a facilitative student centred infra structure. A student centred infra structure that might be taken as a proxy for institutional and senior management's understanding of the requirements for distance education. (These systems might even indicate its mainstreaming). Therefore I hypothesised senior management would be critical to successful distance education provision in campus universities. This was my starting point in interviewing the international leader/experts. That is I expected a confirmation from them that successful distance education necessitated the introduction and implementation of appropriate distance education friendly administrative processes and procedures and consequently where this did not happen distance education would not take off let alone thrive. That is the explanation for why distance education came about and was sustained in campus universities would be because it was supported by sympathetic senior management. A senior management that was both in accord with the values of distance education and who were ensuring appropriate infrastructure was in place.

It became however very clear in the stage one interviews that successful implementation was more than infrastructure. Which is not to say that infrastructure is unimportant. During the stage one interviews with the international leader/experts, a sense of the distance education workers began to emerge. Certainly there was an emphasis on leadership and what these leader/experts had done. However they did not give accounts of promoting distance education's institutional requirements through the university's committees and regulations, and thereby setting up   the student centred

structures within which distance education could flourish and that the distance education literature presupposed was essential. Rather they talked of creating a culture in which the people working on distance education provision could make it happen and thrive. This was discernible in the first three interviews in stage one even though the discussions about successful distance education provision were fairly wide ranging. This suggested that with subsequent leader/experts a more specific focus on what they had done while in post to enable distance education should be adopted. The first three interviews in stage one were more general, focusing on what is needed for successful distance education provision. This more focused approach led to much more expansive responses from the subsequent seven leader/expert interviews. In these interviews the centrality of the distance education workers to successful distance education provision and the emphasis on the way distance education workers worked and the values they held were highlighted. Distance education workers cooperated in teams with their fellow distance education workers who also held the values that echoed the distance education principles described in chapter two. This suggested that focusing on the distance education workers - what they did and how they engaged with each other might deliver greater understanding about how distance education came about and was sustained in campus universities.

This iterative process, building from one interview to the next, was repeated more intentionally in the stage two interviews where I had more time between interviews to transcribe and immerse myself in the transcripts. Thus for example when talking about their work the early interviewees in stage two hinted at the way it was all getting more difficult to 'work around' the university processes to enable distance education. In the interviews that followed interviewees were asked to expand on this and the changing direction of university management came to the fore e.g. with a stress on the implementation of generic rules applying to all students regardless of their mode of study, an emphasis on assumed efficiency in administrative systems, rigid IT systems etc. These changes in university management can be understood as managerialism as described in chapter three.

It is worth noting that apart from a few supportive individuals in senior management the university as a whole in the universities of this study never made any structural or procedural changes to assist the development and delivery of distance education programmes. Distance education appeared to be succeeding despite, and not as a consequence of, the existence of a distance education infrastructure. Moreover the distance education workers from the very start had to constantly struggle to make distance education fit into hostile administrative systems that had been designed for on campus full time students, and they did this with little or no assistance from senior university management. Thus the research as it unfolded led away from the dominant approaches of the distance education literature with its emphasis on organisation and systems to a focus on the distance education workers themselves, their distance education habitus, as a key to understanding how distance education came about and has been sustained in campus universities. The research for this thesis has taken place over a number of years and has been an iterative, flexible, incremental and developmental process. Thus, as has been described above, the original intention of the research, underpinned by assumptions drawn from the distance education literature, was refined after an analysis of the data from the stage one interviews as described, and insights gained in each interview in stage two were followed up and further explored in following interviews within the same stage.

The use of 'stages' to describe particular phases in the research delivers greater clarity in understanding the approach taken but in reality the research process was less linear and more 'messy' ('backwards and forwards') and dynamic than might be suggested by this phraseology. An interactive and oscillating process of data gathering, related reading and researching the literature, reflection, and a return to more data gathering. That this should be the case is not surprising since it became clear after the stage one interviews that what was of interest in understanding distance education in campus universities was not the presence or absence within institutions of what might be termed distance education systems and structures as described by the distance education literature, but rather the existence of a far more intangible distance education habitus. That is the values, dispositions and ways of working

of distance education workers that are acquired through their distance education work and experiences. I had become aware of the concept of habitus, and its potential to understand   distance education workers from my ongoing reading associated with the research. Moreover habitus could only be discovered through focussing on 'what people actually say and do in specific places' (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 35) - an epistemological assumption that suggests that people are able to describe and interpret their own experiences. Ontologically their distance education narrative is their distance education reality. This distance education reality is socially constructed and context dependent, and these understandings make up the distance education workers' reality and have implications for the doing of their work. That is the distance education habitus is deeply sedimented into the very being of distance education workers.

This is not to say that the distance education workers offer the only interpretation of distance education in campus based universities. Arguably since the data gathered in this research represents the experiences of actual distance education workers, and through their work they are making distance education happen, their narratives carry more significant insight into the position of distance education in campus universities than those that are defined by discernible institutional structures, systems, policies, and processes. Or distance education workers' job descriptions. These even if they existed, and frequently they do not, may bear very little resemblance to what actually happens on the ground. As indeed the research evidenced.

I had set out within a more positivistic approach suggesting that for distance education to develop and be sustained in campus universities it required certain features to be in place which in turn are predicated on the assumption that the social (distance education in campus universities) world has an objective reality independent of the accounts and interpretations of members of that (distance education) society. That is I assumed there was a causal relationship between the structures and systems described in the distance education literature and the existence of successful distance education provision on campus universities. I quickly realised that this was not a satisfactory approach when my interviewees began in stage one to raise issues that were not highlighted in the

distance education literature and were not 'facts' but rather their interpretations, their understandings, their feelings about the '*doing*' of distance education and their role in shaping this. I recognised that what I was capturing had potentially more explanatory power than my first assumptions about researching the subject and that I had to adopt a methodology that enabled me to derive understanding and explanation from the data collected via my interview processes. That is build understanding (knowledge) rather than seeking to prove or disprove a particular theory. My thesis therefore had what Meloy (2004) has termed an '*emergent design*'.

I was unsurprisingly therefore encountering and addressing an epistemological issue. What is authentic knowledge about distance education in campus based universities and how is it acquired? I had assumed that my first interviewees would confirm the distance education literature concerning distance education success factors and I would then construct a hypothesis reflecting this to test in the field - a deductive process in which evidence is collected to confirm or refute the hypothesis. This would be relatively easy to replicate – a key feature of the scientific method for those who favour more positivistic approaches to knowledge and knowledge creation in the social sciences. And it would enable, once terms were defined, the gathering of factual, objective data on whether or not, or to what extent universities had institution wide distance education procedures and processes from which I could present some abstractions about what I had learned. I was visualising at this time it would be about the management of distance education in campus universities. However it was not so much that this was an invalid approach but rather it was in itself inadequate, even inappropriate for the problem as I had come to understand it following the first round of interviews. Such an approach would miss out on so much rich data which I was learning gave much greater meaning to the development and sustainability of distance education in campus universities. The gathering of evidence in a more 'bottom up' process through the examination of distance education narratives and then inducing a conclusion from the patterns and themes observed, seemed far more appropriate for the research problem. Thus the approach adopted firmly places the research methodology at the qualitative end of the quantative – qualitative continuum as it foregrounds distance

education workers' 'stories'. Narratives do not deliver tangible, objective, verifiable facts in the manner favoured by positivists but they illustrate that there are other ways of knowing about the social world than that assumed by a scientific approach through eliciting unique, subjective, and evocative stories of experience.

I use the idea of a quantitative – qualitative continuum because I wish to avoid falling into the misleading trap of assuming there is a 'pure' inductive or deductive approach. Blaikie (2009) makes the point that when inductive theorists generate and interpret their data they do not do this with a blank mind – the kinds of questions asked and the analytical categories employed have been derived deductively from previous work in the field. Similarly theorists setting out to test a hypothesis will be informed by a body of theory that has been inductively derived from prior observations. So whilst themes emerged I was using my understanding from the literature, and as I came to recognise, through the research, my experience as a worker in the field, to identify and interpret the narratives.

Making the discovery of the significance of distance education worker narratives was a breakthrough in my thinking and in the doing of the research. It was liberating. Originally, as I have noted, I had anticipated that my first round interviewees would confirm, perhaps in a more nuanced way, the distance education thesis concerning what needs to be in place to ensure sustainable developments. I would   then 'discover' whether these distance education requirements were or were not in place, an approach Elias (CLMS 2003) terms 'scientificization', which was obscuring and inhibiting and in no way adequately capturing the complexity of the phenomena I was trying to understand. Thus whilst I did not wish to take issue with the importance of infra structure to support distance education, accounts that explain distance education simply in terms of the technical requirements, are inadequate. Re-focusing on distance education workers' narratives was a breakthrough in two senses.

By foregrounding narrative I gained a much richer understanding of the social and temporal context within which distance education in campus universities has and does take place. Distance education did not just arrive on campus fully

formed. Distance education workers made and make it happen. Thus, as one of my interviewees told me, distance education came about in his department following an informal conversation with another colleague. My interviewee had done some work for the UKOU and thought it was a '*good thing*' but he considered it would not, and could not happen in his university as they had no distance education infra structure or capability and no distance education modules. He recognised that between his colleague and himself they had lots of contacts around the world who had told them about the need for the kind of courses his department offered. '*I promised her after our discussion that I would go away and think about it more.*' And he did.

> '*I walked the dog for miles. At that point PJ (Admin colleague) was doing an OU degree so we had some idea about distance education and I had written two modules for the OU course on economics of the public sector. So I had some idea about how to put distance education modules together and PJ knew about students receiving distance education, and that was the sum total of our knowledge. But I thought we could put together a business plan that would generate income but not require great income invested, income that the university did not have….And the more I thought about it, as long as we kept one module ahead of the students, I thought we could do it. So I went to the University with a business plan and the University gave me £6,000 in 1988/89 to start DL. And that £6,000 was essentially to purchase a word processor to enable us to produce materials.*
> *(PJ Academic University B)*

And these stories, thick description as Geertz (1973) describes them, tell us much about the emergence and workings of distance education in campus based universities. Thus my research methodology became ethnographically informed – exploring social phenomena from the point of view of the group being studied. This enabled me to access the distance education workers' interpretation of their situated distance education work, as well as exploring their biographies within distance education. This approach has a long tradition

within the social sciences – e.g. 'Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs' (Willis 1977). In this study the researcher participated in the boys' lives and recorded group interviews of the boys, their parents and their teachers. This classic study illuminated the way in which a researcher can be part of the world they are studying and yet remain 'detached' from it in order to be able to understand, interpret and theorise it. Indeed narratives, storytelling, memoirs and autobiographies are well established methodological strategies for undertaking qualitative inquiry in many disciplines.

This approach also sat more comfortably with my ethical sense about 'doing' research. Freire makes the point that,

> *those who name the world control it, whereas those who have the   world named for them are likely to become the objects of discursive oppression.' (*Dressman 2006: 348*)*

The truth of Friere's observation became apparent to me as I reflected on the distance education literature, where those who make it happen figure as functionaries who appear only when they are deemed to be in need of training to fulfil a particular task, empty vessels, whose ongoing active agency in their work is never recognised or described. Hughes in 'Learning to Smoke' makes the point that traditional explanations of smoking objectify the smoker - smoking begins and ends at the purely biological level ignoring how

> *'smokers themselves have an active and crucial role in shaping the experience of smoking'* (Hughes 2003 p.9).

So it is with the distance education workers. And as the quotation from PJ above illustrates it is those working in distance education who develop and shape it from the start with their ideas, and from their reflection on their ongoing experience. Indeed it became apparent that the knowledge acquired by distance education workers counted for little in the universities in which they worked. A number of interviewees reported that I was the first person who talked to them about what they actually did and how and why they did it. And this was despite considerable reorganisation of their work taking place to make

them '*more efficient*' at the time of the research. Thus for me it felt not only important and appropriate to capture the distance education world as distance education workers tell it but to privilege distance education workers narratives about how distance education works in campus based universities over technical and abstract descriptions of how distance education should work.

Capturing distance education workers' narratives also felt more comfortable as I am not an unknowing disinterested researcher. So why was I pretending to act like one? I have worked in a wide range of distance education provisions all my professional life and have a great respect and regard for distance education workers. Putting this aside might have been hard. On the other hand worrying about what I feared might be a lack of scientific objectivity was ill conceived, for, as Mills suggests, one's own professional experiences, or the intersections between history and biography, are a useful starting point for research. Indeed, Mills highlights the centrality of 'experience' in all aspects of intellectual life:

> '*What this means is that you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it....To say that you can 'have experience', means, for one thing, that your past plays into and affects your present, and that it defines your capacity for future experience. ..*' (C.W. Mills 1959 pp 195-6.)

The concept of the 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983) has been a profoundly influential idea throughout my professional life. Schön argued that the problems professionals face cannot be solved by the simple application of technical rationality. Rather lifelong learning occurs when a practitioner analyses experiences in order to understand and learn from that experience.

As I pondered over what I was trying to do after the stage one interviews it felt distinctly odd at this stage in my career not to harness reflective practitioner ideas into my research methodology. And I found myself wondering about how I had ignored my lived experience from the methodology I had originally chosen. Why had I started out assuming that my professional knowledge, whilst acceptable to guide the problem I was seeking to explore, did not itself proffer

valid knowledge and insights? It raised for me questions at the heart of the epistemological debates within the social sciences. What counts as knowledge? And what are 'appropriate' and 'legitimate' methods for social science research? I had commenced my research caught up within dominant paradigms and ways of thinking, especially about research methodology, which had deep roots. And I had not appreciated or addressed the implications of this until undertaking the first stage research. 'Facts' discovered by research are inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms of the researchers as Kuhn (1962) had drawn attention to.

The responses of my first round interviewees whilst stressing all the tangible infra-structure issues expected were also emphasising more intangible, less measurable 'critical success factors' – feelings and ideas about the worth of distance education as a social good, involving team work and collegiality, a concern and focus on students - were comments and attitudes that emerged in these interviews. These were profound expressions relating to values concerning the work of *doing* distance education. These accorded with my own lived experience about how distance education succeeds in practice, as opposed to any theoretical/technical knowledge I and others might have. And thus it seemed to me to be critical data to be explored further in understanding distance education developments within campus based universities.

Therefore in stage two I decided that I should consciously harness my first hand discernment about distance education both in the collecting of distance education workers' accounts of working in distance education and in analysing these from my own experiences of working in many different distance education provisions. (How I actually analysed these narratives is described later in this chapter.) So essentially my methodological journey drew me towards an interpretive approach based on qualitative data – both ethnographic (recording and analysing distance education workers' accounts and descriptions of their work experiences) and auto-ethnographic (in harnessing my own personal distance education experiences to inform my analysis). Ashton describes this as

> *'the fuzzy edges that surround the ethnographic and the interpretive approach'* (Ashton H: 2012 p. 68)*.*

In practice, as Goodwin notes, the distinction between methodological approaches is often blurred in the actual process of doing research (CLMS 2004)

There are some shortcomings to an ethnographic interview methodology. Kuenback (2003) identified issues around the limits of 'narrativity' and limits of the interview situation itself. Thus interviewees may not talk about or may overlook issues that '*do not figure prominently in their awareness...(and which)....do not lend themselves to narrative accounting*' (Kuenback p.462). In addition since interviews are essentially static and frequently take place out of the context of the interviewee, Kuenback argues, it then becomes difficult to develop a 'natural' context for exchange as the interviewees are separated from their 'natural' environments that may, she suggests, '*obstruct themes that are the foci of the investigation*' (Kuenback p.462).

These are very valid issues and I worried about them at the beginning of stage two of my research – might I distort the process by the direction of my questions and indeed by my very 'insider' presence? Although in the stage one interviews I adopted the same semi structured approach these concerns were not to the forefront of my mind. Perhaps this was because all the stage one interviewees were experienced and knowledgeable about the field and would confidentially be able to correct me if they thought I was over guiding the interview. That is they had recognised authority and power in the field. At stage two I was concerned that I might be putting words into my subjects' mouths particularly as I was now interested in areas that had not been explored in the distance education literature. In the event I don't think this happened. The semi structured interview approach had little direction from me, not all questions were worded in the same way, and I used very open ended questions which were in reality prompts to interviewees to freely talk. E.g. 'how did distance education come to be at university X? 'How did you get into working in distance education?' 'What do you like/not like about working in distance education?' 'How do you think distance education will develop here?' This allowed the interviewees time to say what they wanted to. Indeed when I listened to the

recordings, and read the transcriptions of the interviews I was surprised at how little I spoke. One interviewee even apologised for his 'monologue'. The interviews seemed more like a conversation, having no predetermined form as they were based on a series of topics with the interviewee - me - leading the conversation with my interventions exploring and clarifying what was being said. I did feel that the interviewees were able to talk in detail and depth and to speak for themselves and, as I gave them the transcribed text to review, they had an opportunity to amend and even delete what they had said[18]. (The issue of 'freedom to speak' is a point I will return to in my discussion relating to ethics as it needs further comment.)

This approach is insider research with me as the researcher (auto) researching the group (ethno) to which I professionally belong and associate. I had a 'natural' rapport with the interviewees - I knew what they were talking about and they recognised that I knew the field – the language, the work, the issues etc[19]. Most of the interviewees said how much they enjoyed talking about their work to someone who understood what they did since many at their university had '*no idea*'.

It could be argued, as Hayano (1979) did, that this is a more honest approach as it is problematic to make someone the 'subject' of research, as Freire observed, without additionally recognising the researcher as part of the knowledge making process.   Thus the researcher becomes part of the 'knowledge – making relation'; activating

> '*marginalised and minoritized groups by enunciating that these 'voices from within' must articulate themselves on their own terms and not on the outsider's terms' (*Zake and DeCesare 2011:196*)*

In other words ethnographic researchers openly recognise, draw upon and harness their experiential knowledge to undertake their research. The

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[18] Only one interviewee chose to amend the text of her interview. And this she said was for clarity.

[19] I was aware that a number of the interviewees had done an internet search on me before we met.

researcher is embodied, has a presence, within the research and research relationships. (Woodward 2008, and Goode 2014).

These deliberations on appropriate methodology, as has already been said, were a part of my many-layered reflections on the stage one interviews, which led me to recognise that I needed to understand 'how distance education came to be' in campus based universities. The emergence of distance education was not an irrelevant historical matter. Nor is distance education a static social phenomenon. Indeed it was developing even as the research took place. As I have described I needed to adopt a methodology that would capture this. The work of Norbert Elias and Figurational sociology suggests a 'two-way traffic'[20] between theory and research. Thus in the worrying about interpreting my interviews I found a theoretical approach that helped me develop my methodology and my theoretical framework by enabling/allowing me to focus on the process by which distance education emerged and continued in campus based universities as told by distance education workers. What workers said about this was not 'noise' contaminating the true data of identified distance education structures but core to the research itself. Human beings for Elias and Figurational sociology are not self-contained. Rather they exist within their social and historical context. Moreover all our actions without exception involve both cognition and emotion. Distance education workers' attachments to distance education, both distance education students and their fellow distance education workers, emerged as fundamental in the second stage interviews in which distance education workers describe their working lives as they experience them rather than through the 'mask' of 'official' distance education processes and procedures. These attachments might suggest distance education work is emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) in ways not dissimilar to work in nursing and social work for example. Indeed all interviewees emphasised the importance of empathy as critical to successful distance education work.

The processes of data collection and analysis are subjective and open to interpretation (Bryman, 2004). All the distance education workers interviewed

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[20] This term was used by CLMS (M1U2 P. 61) Foundations of Social Research to describe the symbiosis of theory and research found in Norbert Elias's work.

had different experiences and 'stories' but in the research I was not looking for some universal truth rather I was looking for common patterns through gaining an understanding of distance education workers' interpretations of their work as they experienced it. I have described so far my insider presence in this process in identifying themes and patterns. As I conducted, transcribed and reflected on the interviews I was having 'deja vu' moments. I had experienced situations akin to those my informants were talking about. This could not be explained by my interpersonal communication skills or even 'empathy' with my subjects. (The skills identified for good ethnographic researchers. Clough & Nutbrown, 2007.) It was more than that. This was my working world too. And raised the concern about what was I to do with my distance education memory?

My supervisor suggested that I look at auto-ethnography in the sense of using my experience as part of the research data itself and not only as a tool for interpreting my interviews. Auto-ethnography, as the retrospective viewpoint of a person interpreting their own past, largely depends upon the author's current preferences and opinions and part of its function is to preserve and remain faithful to the writer's personality. Thus it is a process of gathering '*knowledge from the past and not necessarily knowledge about the past*' (Bochner quoted by Hamdan 2012). Chang has observed, '*auto-ethnographers are privileged with a holistic and intimate perspective on their familiar data*' (Chang 2008 p. 52). Indeed many feminist researchers advocate for research that starts with one's own experience precisely because it is more intimate, empathetic, inclusive and process-orientated (Neuman 1994, and Ellis 2004). Arguably this is in contrast to the dominant objective 'scientific' and 'male' points of view and gives

> '*auto-ethnographers an edge over other researchers in data collection and in–depth data analysis/interpretation*' (Chang 2008 p.57).

Auto-ethnographic accounts, like ethnographic ones, are inevitably 'retrospective and selective' (Burgess 1984 p.251). I wrote a chronological autobiography starting with my first distance education post and moving along

my distance education timeline. I focused on significant episodes in each post trying to be candid and truthful in my reflections. And following Duncan (2004) I tried to support what I wrote with reference to 'hard data' to back up what I was writing about myself and distance education – e.g. documents, papers and articles I had written during the course of my professional life.

I struggled with this process and felt decidedly uncomfortable about it. My presence felt overwhelming. It felt self promoting and that I was stepping into the narratives of my distance education workers when I had wanted to privilege their accounts. I wanted to '*locate*' (Mantel 2017) and immerse myself within their stories to better understand them but not construct their stories, an issue MacLeod (2016) alludes to in using biographies in museum curation. Subjectivity, in the sense of the insider perspective, attuned me to the meaning distance education work had for my interviewees. On the other hand as Baur and Ernst (2011) note, my subjectivity could lead to my misinterpreting the research by being partial and distorting and '*entangled*' in my own '*value system*'. The Eliasian tension of involvement and detachment (Baur and Ernst 2011, Dunning and Hughes 2013).

I therefore decided to abandon auto-ethnography and concentrate my data collection - the interview/conversations with distance education workers. I recognise, as Wall (2008) has noted, that there is an inherent contradiction in this. After all had a researcher interviewed me about my distance education experiences and it had been recorded and transcribed it would have

> '*legitimacy as data despite the fact that both the interview transcript and my auto-ethnographic text would be based on the same set of memories*' (Wall 2008 p. 45).

It was an incontestable fact that I was bound into the figurations of distance education, and therefore 'knowledgeable' and 'knowing' about some distance education workplaces. No methodology would be perfect, and to progress with my research I needed to use my experiences as a heuristic device to better understand distance education in the campus universities being studied. Thus I immersed myself in the interview transcripts and this enabled themes to

emerge. Themes I recognised from my own involvement in distance education practice. Thus for example I could hear the need to relate to distance education students, and I could discern the focus on students and the moral duty felt by distance education workers to do all they possibly could, and more, to support distance education students in their studies. With an appreciation of the features of communities of practice and a recognition of the importance of habitus it was possible to not only understand in a more theoretical way the narratives of the interviewed distance education workers, but also to comprehend the development of distance education in campus universities as being so much more than the causal consequences of having distance education structures and systems.

At this time, as I was worrying about methodology and reflecting on the stage two interviews I had completed, I attended a number of funerals for distance education colleagues. I was contemplating the emerging themes - arising from both from my experience and my interviews - when it became apparent that the eulogies captured similar threads to those I was discerning about why working in distance education had been so meaningful to my dead colleague(s). This felt like a form of triangulation. I had teased out from my memory concepts that clarified my experience working in distance education, which were confirmed and supported by the eulogies, that also resonated with my discussions with interviewees. The excursion into autho-ethnography had not been a dead end. Indeed it sharpened my understanding of insider research, hopefully my reflexivity, and enabled me to feel greater confidence in the themes as they emerged from my analysis of the stage two interviews. In effect my emerging methodological approach was fundamentally, and in an ongoing way, inextricably interwoven with my research subject (Dunning and Hughes 2013).

Data Collection

This thesis is about distance education in campus universities in the UK. The first stage of the research set out to explore what practising distance education leaders and internationally recognised experts identified as the critical success factors for distance education. Did they confirm the emphasis placed in the literature on the necessity for distance education policy, systems and infra-

structure? I was assuming that if these 'success factors' could be identified their absence might start to explain the peripheral place of distance education in British campus based universities - an educational provision that had taken off in some departments in some universities but not others, appeared to be a bottom up development and was not mainstreamed - if by mainstreaming, following an assumption of Irele (2004) is taken to be integrated into, and equal, to campus provision. Moreover I thought such an approach might begin to identify the role of senior management in providing, or not providing, leadership for distance education.

Stage one: International Distance Education Leaders

The first stage of the research involved interviewing non UK distance education leader/experts. Whilst the UK has arguably the world's most well-known and successful distance education university, the UKOU, it is single mode – i.e. it is solely distance education. My research was concerned with distance education developments in UK campus universities. Canada, Australia and New Zealand to name just a few countries have longstanding dual mode provision. Moreover unlike other countries in Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada there is no UK distance education professional association. In light of this I felt there would be greater understanding and knowledge base outside of the UK regarding the critical success factors for introducing distance education into campus based universities[21].

Stage one evolved into two distinct parts. In the first part I interviewed three internationally renowned distance education leaders who were professionally known to me and who had written extensively on distance education. I asked them to reflect on their careers and to identify critical success factors for distance education to succeed within campus universities. The interviewees included a Pro-Vice Chancellor of a South African mega open university[22], a Professor of Distance Learning and head of a large Australian dual mode

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[21] Indeed the very particular development and circumstances of the OU means that generally OU staff are unaware of alternative models and ways of doing distance education. Something that became very apparent to me when I was employed at the Commonwealth of Learning and required consultants to support distance education work in developing countries.

[22] A mega university is defined by Daniel as a distance teaching university with over 100,000 active students in degree-level courses (Daniel 1996)

university's flexible learning facility, and a Canadian Dean of the Learning & Teaching Centre of a dual mode higher education institution. All three were visiting the UK at the time I was starting my research, fulfilled my criteria of distance education leaders who had been practitioners, and would be able to reflect on what made distance education work, and were willing to be interviewed. All three were widely experienced both within their own countries and internationally and had filled various roles relating to distance education in other institutions during their careers. All three stressed the difference between distance education and face to face provision - emphasising the greater complexity of distance education and the importance of operations and systems identified in the foundational texts of distance education. In addition all talked about institutional context, and specifically institutional management and leadership. For all three management and leadership were core to success. They argued that whilst a distance education infrastructure was a necessary condition for the success of distance education it was not sufficient. And indeed was unlikely to exist without senior institutional leadership and management that both understood and actively supported distance education – both within and without the institution – '*creating a distance education culture*' as one interviewee termed it.

These interviews confirmed my thinking - institutional management matters. Not only in the sense of providing the infrastructure within which distance education could thrive. These interviewees introduced an additional factor - a distance education culture which they considered institutional leadership needed to create. I therefore decided to explore this further with another group of distance education leaders and focus more specifically on what they had done to foster distance education. In particular I was hoping that more light might be shed on institutional culture. These were more focused interviews addressing what they had done rather than the more general approach of the first three interviews which explored success factors for distance education.

A second sample of seven Canadian distance education leaders and managers were interviewed. These leaders and managers represented a wider range of organisations offering distance education, were well regarded in the field and were all professionally known to me. The sample was made up as follows: A

recently retired president of an open university; a recently retired president of a dual mode university; two heads of distance learning units in dual mode universities; a vice president of an open university, a very experienced development educationalist who advised on distance education in developing countries; and a head of partnerships for international distance education training. The choice of Canadian interviewees was entirely pragmatic and practical. Canada has a well-developed and established distance education provision across all educational and training sectors. In addition I was given financial support by the Commonwealth of Learning headquartered in Vancouver for whom I had worked and who had an interest in leadership and management in distance education from a training perspective. In these seven interviews, as I have suggested, the focus of my questions changed. Rather than the focus being simply on abstract success factors, admittedly answered from the interviewees' experience, I asked the seven directly what they did or had done as distance education leaders to make distance education develop and thrive. Although I did not ask them explicitly about creating a distance education culture they all stressed the criticality of creating an enabling community, creating partnerships - often across the university or organisation - and creating a vision of what could be achieved with distance education described by a few as a social good which all would and could share. These were seen as core leadership tasks to ensure success and sustainability of any distance education provision.

Stage Two: UK Distance Education Workers

The first stage of my research suggested that traditional explanations for how successful distance education developed and is maintained offered a very incomplete understanding of how distance education programmes came to be and are sustained. Rather it seemed to me that the first stage interviews were pointing to more intangible factors for distance education success than institutional infra structure or technologies. Interviewees were talking about work communities, ways of working in teams and partnership, and, very significantly, the values of 'working together'. So in what became the substantive research phase I sought to investigate how distance education workers (administrators and academics) in UK campus universities described their work - how they

understood how it worked and how this work of theirs fitted into the wider university. In other words to uncover the distance education workers' narratives as discussed earlier. At this time, and prompted by my stage one research, I started to explore ideas about communities of practice and was introduced to the work of Norbert Elias on habitus. Thus it was that my methodology, as described earlier, was a constant iteration between data gathering, related reading and researching the literature, reflection, and a return to more data gathering.

Research Sites

As most UK campus universities that offer distance education do so at post graduate level I decided that this would be a common feature of my sample – i.e. the research would not focus on workers who work on undergraduate programmes[23]. I had originally thought I would centre the research on one university with a number of distance education departments since none of the departments did distance education in exactly the same way. However it was felt that this might not offer a sufficient basis for comparability. So I eventually decided to select three universities, all in the UK, which were offering distance education post graduate programmes. None of the universities were post 1992 institutions, and none were universities that had outsourced their provision to private companies like Laureate International Universities. One was a member of the Russell group. My selection of universities was based on my knowledge of which university departments offered distance education programmes. With two universities I was able to make contact through my professional links and the third through directly contacting a named person found on the university and programme web site. Two of the universities had long term involvement with distance education and the third (The Russell Group University) was a more recent entrant - but had been involved in distance education for more than 5 years. I considered that this was the minimum time necessary for a university to claim it offered distance education rather than an experimental project.

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[23] Two departments in the sample did in fact offer undergraduate distance education programmes.

The number of universities, departments and categories of staff are shown in the table below:

University	Number of departments	Total number of interviewees	Academics	Administrators	Type of interview
A	1	6 (1m + 5f)	1(f)	5(1m + 4f)	Group and individual
B (Russell Group)	2	6 (3m +3f)	2 (1m +1f)	4(2m + 2f)	Individual
C	6	15 (10m + 5)	7(m)	8(3m + 5f)	Individual

(*m is male and f is female*.)

Categorising staff as either academic or administrative related to their terms of employment. In reality this was somewhat misleading because all academics did amounts of what might be considered administrative work on the distance education programmes and many of the administrative staff did academic work i.e. wrote and /or revised modules and advised students. Although all administrative staff were anxious to stress that there was a limit to their academic advice and input. Interviewees discussed this blurring of administrative and academic work inherent, many would argue, in distance education (Perraton 1991). Only one administrator within my cohort was upgraded to academic (teaching only) in recognition of her academic work (University B) and is reported as an academic in this research. Another interviewee, reported as an administrator at University C, was on a teaching only contract - a teaching fellow. Two interviewees were on temporary contracts - one full time and administrative (University B) and one part time and academic (University C). All the full time academics, apart from the interviewee on a teaching only contract, defined themselves as 'research active'.

There were in total 14 male and 13 female interviewees. There was no attempt to ensure an equal number of male and female interviewees. I left the selection of interviewees to the contact at the given university department merely emphasising the need for those involved in distance education to participate. So this research does not focus on gender as noted in the introduction. Looking back I might have anticipated more female academics to be in the sample and

many more female administrators than was actually the case. Since it emerged from this study that distance education can be viewed as emotional labour the theme of gender might be a worthwhile theme to pursue in any future study. However this was not the path followed in this research.

During the period of interviewing considerable reorganisation was taking place at all the universities with departments merging, losing functions to more central units etc. What is reported in the research is the departmental position of the interviewee at the time of the interview.

I was keen to include in the interview sample a representation of those who were at the forefront of introducing distance education in their university. This was only possible at University C since people had died and/or moved away and lost contact with colleagues. At University C I was able to interview three retirees (two academics and one administrator) and one academic who moved to another university. Interviewing the founders of distance education programmes was important as stage one interviewees had indicated the importance of the distance education vision and community in understanding how it emerged and was sustained.

My contact person within a distance education department usually suggested who the appropriate distance education people were to approach and together we arranged this, with me writing directly to invite participation and explaining what the research was about. At all three universities everyone approached was keen to participate and were always suggesting more people and departments for me to visit. The suggestion at University A to have a group discussion arose from within the department. And it worked well. However transcribing the discussion proved exceedingly complicated and time consuming as it was hard to distinguish the different voices clearly. So I did not encourage it when talking with others. As the interviewing progressed I also got the impression that interviewees liked to talk to me directly on a one to one basis - it gave them the chance to tell their story.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed and interviewees were told at all times they could withdraw from the process. All interviewees received a copy of the transcript and were free to alter and delete those parts that they did not like

or preferred they had not said. This did happen on one occasion - the interviewee felt what she had said needed clarification. She made no radical alterations. Interviews were scheduled for an hour but usually took considerably longer and frequently carried on after the interview had formally ended. Many interviewees were reluctant to end the conversation and often carried on after the tape recorder was turned off. I made notes of these conversations.

Ethical Concerns and Considerations and the Rawness of Opening up 'Wounds'

The usual guarantees concerning anonymising the individuals, departments and institutions were given, and I promised that since it might be possible to identify a department by the distance education programmes I had asked for a moratorium period for the thesis. Interviewees were very frank and in some cases very critical of the management in their universities. Without these guarantees they may not have spoken so freely. On the other hand interviewees were pleased to talk about their distance education work and probably would have talked very openly despite such guarantees – as indeed they all did. Only one interviewee who had originally agreed to participate I sensed was too frightened to participate. She kept cancelling her interview. This was in a department where one of her distance education colleagues was in the process of leaving for another job and the other was planning to retire. These two had been interviewed and were exceedingly critical of their university and their college head. Moreover I think she was also overburdened with work and fearful for the future of her job. After the third cancelation I did not persist. In a number of departments at Universities A and C there was discussion about whether or not interviewees should seek permission from their managers to talk to me. I did not intervene or offer to talk to managers in these situations, but would have done so if asked. In the end no one spoke to their managers about the interviews. In another department I was asked by the Distance education interviewees to 'inform' the head of department out of courtesy (not for permission) it turned out he was keen to talk to me despite having no direct involvement in distance education. He was hugely supportive of his colleagues. At University A where the manager was not asked for his permission, an interviewee told me she was sure, if he had been asked, that the manager

would wish to have a copy of the interview transcripts so he could edit them. At University B this was not an issue and in both departments the managers were involved and helped organise interviews.

Insider research has strengths as I discussed earlier. Insider research, (where the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson, C. 2002) e.g. studying one's own workplace, can itself lead to potential ethical concerns as distinct to epistemological (validity) ones discussed earlier. Nor are these fully examined in the ethical review process - a rather

> *'bureaucratic undertaking which often represents the practice of research as an ordered, linear process with objective principles/ rules that inform/direct ethical decision making and moral action.'* (Floyd and Linet 2012)

My research was not linear. I had been employed at one of the universities – and knew many of those interviewed. And even where I was not employed some interviewees knew of me. My very knowledge of the field and what was involved in developing and delivering distance education courses may have encouraged interviewees to be more 'open', disclose more, than they might otherwise have chosen to do. Was I abusing their trust I worried? I hoped that I had put in place mechanisms that would address this. Although Mercer (2007) researching higher education has argued that '*insider*' is not as straight forward as the term implies in that one is sometimes perceived by one's subjects as an insider and sometimes not; and as a researcher she felt she was sometimes an insider and sometimes not. With the growth of practitioner research in recent years, there has been considerable awareness of potential problems and the development of strategies to overcome or minimise any potential problems that might arise. Gibbs and Costley (2006) have introduced into this discussion deontological ethics – i.e. "duty" or "obligation" ethics. Where the emphasis is on the trust the researcher in insider research builds up with the participants. Thus successful ethics of research from this perspective are grounded in the world of work (the community of practice) and require

*'being respectful, sensitive, imbuing confidence, openness, democratic sensitivity and a feel for the micro-politics of a situation amongst other understandings and nuances of understanding. These, we argue, can only be acquired through real-life participation and understanding for care for others.'(*Gibbs and Costley 2006 p. 247*.)*

In this approach the emphasis is not on technical ethical procedures but on the researcher 'being ethical' because it is part of their being. Throughout I strived for this.

However the research process led to unanticipated outcomes. Distance education workers in campus based universities were at the time of my research experiencing major changes to their working lives as universities reorganised and senior university management was becoming increasingly divorced from departmental management. A number of interviewees were upset and emotional about what for them was the destruction of their life time commitment to their students and departmental colleagues. I had sought to establish, as discussed earlier, an interactive empathetic relationship that enabled interviewees to tell their story and, as I have reported, this felt a comfortable way of doing my research. However I did not anticipate that some interviewees would seek me out after the interviews to talk about their employment futures and talk more personally about how unhappy they were. 'What should they do?' 'What did I advise?' Anxiety and distress seemed to suffuse many. And a number of interviewees at all three universities had had, or went on to have, time off for stress. There was nothing I could do other than listen supportively. It was upsetting. These conversations and the impact of listening closely and repeatedly when transcribing them, and hearing the sadness interviewees shared began to get to me. It was very raw. For I too had experienced what my interviewees were saying. A disregard for students and a complete lack of interest, even dismissal, from senior management for the professional knowledge and experience of those who had worked or did work in the field. Fortunately my supervisor secured some resource to assist with the

transcription and coincidently I broke my arm which forced me to take time out from my PhD and allowed me to think and reflect more.

Certainly I felt ill prepared for my emotional response. I felt sorrow both for the interviewees and the circumstances they found themselves in. I also felt distress for an unexpected ethical dilemma. Having established rapport and showing empathy I had encouraged interviewees to voice and share their anguish. Emotional reactions to the research experience is not new and is increasingly recognised by researchers especially in the fields of health and welfare. e.g. Mills and Coleman acknowledge that those researching older people with dementia may feel '*helpless, vulnerable, and forlorn*' (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer 2001 p. 124). Having a break from my thesis enabled me to reflect more on this issue. Unsatisfactory as I felt it to be I did not feel that the ethical issues were resolvable and research might well be described as a parasitical activity (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer 2001 p. 129). On the other hand my own emotional response to the ethical considerations that surfaced did help me to interpret and understand the interviews in greater depth, and could be seen as a necessary part of my reflexive processes.

Summary

This chapter has been concerned to explain the methodological journey of the research. A journey that started steeped in the literature of distance education and finished within the sociology of communities of practice, habitus and managerialism. A journey that explored the understandings of leader/experts as to what makes distance education work and out of which grew the focus on distance education workers as critical to that understanding. A journey that found the orthodox literature of distance education unsatisfactory in describing and explaining the development and maintenance of distance education in campus universities, and necessitated an exploration into the sociological literature to understand and in turn progress the research. This journey, because of the inadequacies of the distance education literature, inevitably led to an interplay of theory and research - i.e. the non linear backward and

forwards as described earlier in this chapter - as I discovered the sociological literature. For this reason the research methodology is described as emergent. This can be seen in the following two chapters which demonstrate how the two concepts of community of practice and habitus became powerful tools to both identify and describe what was being 'discovered' as well as offering a powerful understanding of how distance education came about and works in campus universities.

In addition the chapter highlights the unanticipated emotional and ethical considerations that arose for me as the researcher. Whilst emotional involvement is not addressed further in the research it adds further insight into the literature of emotional labour signalled earlier in this thesis.

Chapter 5 The Study (Stage One) The Leader/Experts

The purpose of stage one of the research was to identify what well known international (non UK) experts and leaders in distance education, (i.e. those who currently had, or in the recent past had, responsibility for distance education provision in their organisation), considered to be the critical success factors in making distance education work. As reported in chapter 4, researching the leaders was two phased and involved conversations that were open ended but revolved around the core issues of implementing and sustaining successful distance education provision. The first three interviews were more abstract in that the interviewees were asked, whilst drawing on their own experience, to identify the success factors for distance education. In the second phase the questioning was turned to ask the seven interviewees directly what they did/had done, and why, to develop successful distance education and what they felt was core to their job, what was difficult, what was critical to making distance education work, and what advice they would pass on to others contemplating setting up distance education.

There was no real difference between the two categories of interviewees in terms of what they considered made distance education successfully work at an institutional level. Although, perhaps inevitably by the nature of the questioning, the phase one interviewees were more expansive about the bigger picture or national context and less institution specific. Thus as NB said in his interview

> *'Leadership is context dependent, and leadership of DL institutions is very different to contact institutions. The HE (*higher education*) milieu is political, especially in South Africa. But this is so for all HE leaders i.e. politics is the framework for all HE leaders. HE operates within an HE system of planning and regulation which circumscribes what can be done. In South Africa centralised planning determines the number of, how many funded FTEs (*Full time equivalent*) each institution gets and who will offer what. It is unlikely that there is any science to this*

rather it is more back of envelope. Post Freedom centralised Ministry control and influence in HE was much stronger, more capable than at present and more interventionist. Now there is no active overseeing at Ministry. This does provide the parameters, the terrain, from where leaders start. A leader can't lead independently of context. The institutional context is very much framed by how strong or not local governance is and the extent to which the Governing Council understands the boundaries of their role. The Governing council appoints the VC and this could put the institution in a bad place – with discourse constrained…

*….University XXX (*mega open university*) is struggling. We have a senior management of over 30 people. Most do not have the capabilities needed to run large complex organisations. Approximately 5% are capable and 30% are not capable at all. This is a challenge. It demands a lot of the capable few. This is so in many parts of the developing world. Any context where the country is on a development trajectory – when patronage leads to the unsophisticated getting appointed, leads to poorly run institutions. In the developing world there is much intellectual ability but not technocratic capability.'*

Thus at an institutional level NB, and the two other interviewees, raised similar issues and concerns as the seven Canadian interviewees. So all ten interviews have been consolidated in this chapter to avoid needless repetition.

All ten interviewees agreed that distance education was very different from contact education because of its greater complexity, requiring more advanced planning and the conscious integration of services and functions.

*It goes without saying that the DL operation has to be systematic and institution wide if it is to be cost effective….its base is economics because it is a planned activity' (*BK)

Indeed all stressed that many senior people in governments and educational institutions did not understand this.They tried

'to squeeze funding into traditional funding models' (NB).

In particular, they reported, it was not widely understood that distance education was front end loaded with regard to development and costs. This means that distance education providers have to expend monies - e.g. to create teaching materials and appropriate administrative systems that reflect the fact that students '*can't just drop in*' (MH) if things go wrong - before any income from student fees to defray costs are received. Up front work in distance education was seen by all as substantial and invariably unrecognised. This up front planning and development was likened by one interviewee to logistics and project planning, requiring those engaged in distance education to think about the whole system in advance. If this is not done AK stressed it is hugely expensive to '*unpick'*. She likened this to constructing a building:

'you can't change your mind when you are putting on the roof.' (AK)

Whilst all the interviewees recognised the critical organisational requirements necessary to underpin distance education they did so within the context in which distance education had to be made to work (e.g. dual and single mode universities, development agencies, technical college, developing country etc.) and focused both on what they had done as leaders as well as any enduring messages they would pass on to others about making distance education work. What emerged from all ten interviews was less tangible than organisational structures and processes and addressed the people centred activity they were engaged in e.g. advocacy, networking, creating a distance education work

culture, building and sustaining team work, articulating a vision of distance education that was underpinned by clearly articulated values and beliefs and which staff '*signed up to*' (DA).   As BK commented '*good systems are driven by values*'. This represented a very different emphasis to the literature of distance education - which gives prominence to de contextualised organisational structures that underpin distance education provision. (As discussed in chapter 3.) Indeed one interviewee (MH) made the point that distance education policy and processes necessitate that distance education values of inclusiveness and respect are embedded and easily discerned in the policy and the action that follows from them.

Thus whilst none of the ten interviewees, (who came from institutions that had very different distance education models), were suggesting distance education systems, processes and policies were unimportant, all considered far more was involved in establishing and sustaining successful distance education than the unproblematic implementation of a check list of technical and operational specifications. Likewise all saw technology - both in terms of the back office functions (e.g. data systems) and e-learning tools - as important, none saw technology on its own determining the success or effectiveness of distance education[24]. JC noted that as a leader in distance education in her dual mode Canadian university she had to '*hold at bay*' the increasing number of people who think distance education is '*just technology*'. Indeed since distance education had always harnessed technology to assist in the delivery (operational and teaching and learning) of distance education provision, technology as everything else it was stressed was part of the '*tool box*' and had to be '*strategically managed*' (NB). EK observed it was so easy to be '*bedazzled*' by the technology rather than focussing on the students. JC noted that the ubiquity of technology encouraged many to think that if they had a computer they could '*do distance education*'. NB stressed that '*the*

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[24]Although one interviewee (RP) did consider the increased use of technology in conventional teaching provision was blurring the distinctness of campus and distance provision. He argued this could be argued for Canada because the conventional distance education student at a campus university in Canada was typically a registered campus student who had failed to get on to their module of choice in their face to face programme and therefore opted for a distance education module. This he said was not so e.g. in Australia where he considered universities did offer actual dual mode study. Other Canadian interviewees did not share this view.

implementation of ICTs is 'not   simply a technical task,' and that one of the problems is that many leaders in higher education do not understand what is required of the technology so

> *'they are at the mercy of the technocrats neither focused on the needs of the university or the needs of students and who* (technocrats) *don't understand the university mission. This L e a d s t o g r e a t w a s t a g e t h r o u g h i n a p p r o p r i a t e developments.'*(NB)

RP expressing the same view noted, universities had to know why they were using technology:

> *'if technology is the answer what is the question? Start with the learning challenge not the technology.'* (RP)

The emphasis these interviewees were making is that the starting point and focus of all usage of technology has to be the students. One interviewee who had been the head of a university centre in an Australian dual mode university that supported distance and flexible learning made the following observations:

> *'Distance learning students and the flexibility they need in order to study need to be included in the design of data bases because systems hang off data bases - registration, counselling, dispatch, regulations etc. If they are not included from the beginning but are included as an after thought this will undermine a student focused distance education provision'* (BK)

Thus BK was emphasising that designing technology systems includes back office functions as well as e-learning tools. And these systems have to be focused around the needs of distance education students for flexibility rather than the other way round. Students can not be made to fit systems. And as one

interviewee, a Canadian past President of a single mode university adamantly observed, if you loose the student focus '*you will fail*' (DA).[25]

All of the interviewees were unvarying in the view that the success of distance education was not the observable aspects of distance education systems and methods as discussed in the literature - these were taken as given - but the less tangible and people centric features like the values of the distance education team and the way distance education professionals carried out their work which were then demonstrated in the way the distance education provision was administered. EK, a Canadian interviewee with extensive international and national experience noted that

> '*it is commonly assumed that successful distance education is learning and technology, when really it is people and leadership*'.
> (EK)

The findings of stage one - what makes distance education work from the distance education leaders/experts perspective - are reported under three headings which reflect what all ten leaders identified as core to their work of ensuring sustainable distance education in their particular context.

1. Advocacy and networking
2. Team work and collaboration
3. Values

Advocacy and Networking

All interviewees talked about the never ending need to advocate and network both within and out-with their institutions. BK observed that from his

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[25]BK also noted that new technologies had become a problem for quality distance education provision in that e.g. e-learning was seen by many, including university heads, as synonymous with distance education, which it was not. Referencing one campus based UK university well known for its successful distance education provision BK said it had become '*contaminated*' by e-learning.

'experience the most important thing for sustainable distance education is institutional commitment.' (BK)

Without it all endeavours he felt would ultimately fail. All interviewees spent much of their time

'informing, persuading and advocating … upwards and downwards' (BK)

for this commitment. All felt that there was often little understanding of distance education at the top of their institutions - how it worked and what it could enable. JC commented that so many, often at senior level, think that distance education

'is merely an add on .. (to what is currently done) … and/or do not understand that it is not blended learning.'

All talked about how they sought to persuade all levels of staff (senior management and academics) that distance education could enable their institution or department to achieve its strategic goals - e.g. with regard to student recruitment, working with governments and professional bodies, improving quality of teaching and learning and student satisfaction etc. without the '*costs of bricks and mortar institutions*' (DA). Thus MB who was head of a service department enabling and supporting academic departments to develop and deliver distance education programmes saw he had to

'align his work to the needs of faculties and schools - and show it'.

JC described this as constantly '*showing*' and '*reshowing*' that distance educators were 'good citizens of the university'. She also reflected that it meant the distance education staff had to be as well qualified as the academic staff in

order to be accepted and to demonstrate they were not '*dumbing down*' academic provision and thereby could be taken seriously.

At the core of misunderstandings and confusion about distance education, interviewees reported, was a lack of understanding about the methodology of distance education which they, as distance education '*champions*' (MB), had to continuously address and re address. NB observed that there were many roles involved in distance education provision which '*just do not exist in conventional provision.*' This means that people carrying out these roles have to be brought together. Thus whilst '*Good teaching is good teaching*' JC noted distance education instructional designers creating and designing the learning resources had to '*anticipate students' cognitive glitches*' and in doing so had to focus on the learners in ways not required by face to face teaching. MH observed that difficulty often arose because faculty were unfamiliar with the

> '*patterned discourse of distance education that did not have the immediacy of the classroom and was a major challenge for face to face universities unfamiliar with this approach.*'

One interviewee said,

> '*We know that much of on-line delivery is really bad. Mostly it is the crude conversion of original resources. Staff just don't understand the methodology (of DL) , or how to develop resources. They have had no training as teachers. The approach at XXX is to offer support and make things easy for academics…..professional development workshops don't work we need to support academics when they need it and all the way through the development process. …working as a team*' (BK).

A further aspect of this lack of understanding interviewees reported was the failure to appreciate the importance of student support[26] to successful distance education outcomes. All interviewees drew special attention to student support and the need to embed this in all distance education provision because whilst distance students might be geographically separate from their lecturers, support staff, and fellow students, this did not mean they had to be unsupported and isolated. Good course design integrates student feedback and support in the design process[27] However as JC ruefully noted whilst one was constantly advocating for student support in

> *'fiscally challenging times it is very easy and predictable that those items that address student support get cut'.*

The distance education leaders interviewed talked about the many roles involved in distance education provision indeed distance education is frequently described as having a complex division of labour (Lentell 2004). For all the leaders interviewed these roles had to be coordinated in order to offer an *'integrated and coherent service'* (DA) which in practice meant, as BK quoted above noted, *'working as a team'*.

Team Work and Collaboration

All ten interviewees talked at length about distance education being a team endeavour. Seven interviewees explicitly and consistently made reference to how this marked distance education out from conventional teaching where the lone teacher goes into the classroom *'and gets on with it'* (EK). This is an individual activity but in distance education it is a cross disciplinary team.

> *'People collaborate', 'people appreciate each other', and 'work with faculty in a mutually respectful way'. 'They collaborate as partners and work collegially.' 'The team is mutually supportive*

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[26] The idea of student support is discussed in chapter 3

[27] Instructional design is discussed in chapter 3

because they have a common base in shared values' (BK, DA, RP, EK, JC, AK, AMR).

It is the task of the distance education leader to be an '*ambassador*' for the distance education methodology, interviewees stressed,

'to create the work culture where collegial relationships flourish, and when networking within the university - (particularly in those models where a distance education unit is a service provider to faculty) - to show by example how this method of working is highly productive as well as supportive' (EK).

JC discussed how in her university distance education brought people together:

'There is a synergy that comes from like minded people working together…….talking together. This would not happen if the faculty were not involved with DL' (JC).

JC described this as the distance education community of practice where all those involved:

'instructional designers, technologists, administrators, and others providing support to students and faculty…have talents that are complementary and where people learn from one another' [28].

She illustrated the involvement and contribution of all in the distance education team in the following way,

'the young person answering the phone with a student having difficulties can provide very useful information to an instructional

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[28] At the time JC had been involved in internal university struggles to retain the distance Education Unit she directed. The University was being encouraged to disperse distance education to other units - faculties and an e-learning unit.

designer or a faculty member. Indeed having someone in the team who understands the administrative systems of the university and can translate this into distance education is hugely important'.

All the interviewees valued this way of working and saw it as very different to the 'individual' approach and organisation of the conventional faculty. Moreover MH stressed in this collegial way the distance education workers had a sense of their value:

'If workers have a sense that they are not valued, don't know where their work fits, unenthusiastic things happen. Enthusiasm and passion is what is picked up from the leader. The leader should embody the values of distance learning'. (MH)

DA made the same point - the distance education leader

'should walk the talk' and 'lead by example…and be seen to do so.'

Creating the environment where team work could thrive and where the values of distance education were understood and held by all.

Values

All the distance education leaders emphasised distance education values. These values encouraged the way of working - in mutually supportive and inclusive teams. The approach to 'doing' distance education work was itself predicated upon wider values relating to the purpose of distance education, '*a vision*' of what distance education was about that they all held, and which informed their approach to developing and delivering distance education programmes. Indeed RP commented that without this vision distance education would 'perish'. The core principle of this vision was a belief in access to education for all those who for whatever reason were, or had been, unable to

access education by attending campus provision. A core value they all held dear:

> *'To me it was very important that people living in the northern part of our province and who did not have access to university education, indeed even people within an easy commute and may not have access - I deeply believed in providing that opportunity and distance learning can uniquely provide this'* (JC).

NB framed the capability of distance education to deliver access to education in terms of social justice. Working in a developing country, NB stressed the capability of distance education t*o 'educate and train large numbers'* where there is a huge need and not sufficient human resource (teachers and lecturers). He argued that in fulfilling this mandate   it was the '*ethical'* responsibility of the leadership to

> *'put in place support systems and learner support. If students drop out - and we   have a large drop out - this is not just a private problem for students but a waste of resources (human and financial). University XXX accepts students so it must bring them up to speed…we have a legacy problem to address - schooling is still dismal, not providing students with the capability to study. Similarly University XXX has a diverse student body with diverse needs and we must provide the support for this diversity.'*(NB)

Studying at a distance, all saw, was difficult for students and the recognition of this difficulty made it imperative that all provision was designed around the student and his/her need   - both the pedagogy and the administration. Otherwise the isolated and unsupported student would fail. Thus in order to help and support students it was necessary to provide student centred support. One interviewee put it this way:

> *'Distance learning is a service industry in which you must focus on support services that are flexible for learners.' (*Universities offering*) 'distance learning are providers in a service industry. Content is important but support for students even more so.'* (DA)

DA went on to say university management who fail to recognise and be responsive to the particular support needs of distance education students need to appreciate that education is '*now demand led and international'*. And he argued failure to provide support will lead to the loss of their distance education provision given international competition in this market. Another interviewee involved in international development noted that many distance education initiatives

> *'neglect the importance of management, admin and student support systems' (AMR).*

This neglect some have argued arises from a focus on the commodification of distance education[29] rather than access and has the inevitable consequences of poor completion rates.

The interviewees were not rejecting the importance of the institutional infra structure that support distance education. Rather they were emphasising the importance of core distance education values over and above this. Since it was the principles of student access, the focus on individual students and how to help them study successfully that under pinned sound pedagogical and administrative distance education systems. In other words if the focus is actually on the student and their distance education study, the right design and delivery questions are asked and the appropriate solutions found.

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[29] Commodification is referenced in the literature review.

A number of interviewees discussed the kind of people needed to run distance education provision. Establishing and maintaining distance education was neither a simple technocratic or mechanistic activity. Rather what emerges is that distance education is a team based and values based practice. NB commented that this made it challenging to recruit appropriate academic and administrative staff

> *'who have the capability and the commitment to make distance education work.'*

DA observed it was a '24/7 commitment'. JC and EK talked about distance educators being a '*special breed*' (EK).

> *'They care about education, they do outreach, they do things other people may not think are important. They fight battles'* (JC).

A picture emerges from these interviews that a key success factor for distance education are the people who make it happen - i.e. those who do distance education work. This was starkly borne out by both MB and DA when they talked about '*cultural*' differences between the campus universities and distance education provision within campus universities. MB noted that universities claim to be '*egalitarian*' but in reality they are '*hierarchical*' and '*elitist*'. Distance education on the other hand thrives where collegial team work applies. DA commented that,

> *'traditionally academics are professor centred not student centred. And traditional universities have structures and reward systems directed on this professor centric view. With allegiances to discipline and colleagues and not students'.*

Distance education on the other hand is focused on access and students. You have to start with '*empathy for students and their lives*' and '*embrace diversity*' (AK).

Discussion

This investigation into what distance education leaders thought were the critical success factors for distance education was undertaken because the vibrant distance education that had been observed was offered in campus universities in the UK did not appear to comply with the prevalent view found in the distance education literature that for distance education to be sustainable it needed to be underpinned by distance education supportive systems and processes. These did not exist. Nor was there any indication to suggest that the use of educational technologies had led to the mainstreaming of distance education. The international leaders/experts interviewed referenced the endless need for internal advocacy. Necessary because institutions needed to be reminded about what was required to sustain distance education - e.g. flexibility of study to ensure meaningful access and which had to be reflected in all administrative processes that related to distance education. JC called this a '*battle*' and MH reported that you have to constantly argue with registry about why

> '*your deadlines are and have to be flexible because people's
> lives are flexible.*'

This ongoing struggle concerning making distance education provision work was reported by leaders from both single and dual mode universities.

None denied the need for appropriate administrative infra structure. Indeed all saw strong relevant and appropriate administrative processes as very important - but invariably what existed in campus provision was inappropriate because it was based around the conventional academic year. Distance education was '*out of synch*' (EK) being a year round study activity which reflected how students lived their lives.

What also emerged from these interviews was the powerful sense of a distance education identity among those who work in distance education. This identity was forged and sustained, interviewees maintained, by distance education having a strong sense of collaborative team work and deeply held common and profound values about access and student centredness. EK, reflecting on distance education provision she had known, remarked that

> *'invariably distance education is first established as a project with project funding. The dilemma is to make it sustainable after the project money runs out…(*the result)*.. 'is that most distance education in campus universities are small businesses with huge personal commitment from those involved.'*

EK's observation accorded with the experience in the UK. A defining feature of UK campus university distance education is that it was born bottom up. That is individuals or groups of individuals within academic departments chose to develop and maintain distance education courses. They were not contractually required to do it. Although incoming staff to a department already offering distance education might be expected to contribute. And the running of distance education courses within departments were indeed akin to small businesses. They were cottage industries. How was this emergence and continuance to be explained? The emphasis the distance education leaders interviewed placed on the special nature of distance education workers - the way they worked together in teams, their values, and the way they saw themselves as different to conventional university workers - suggested that the next stage of the research should focus on the workers themselves rather than leaders or structures and systems. And this is what was done.

Chapter 6 The Study (Stage Two) The Workers

The second stage of the research focused on the distance education workers (administrators and academics) in UK campus universities. The previous chapter reported that the leaders/experts had drawn attention to the importance of the people making distance education happen - the workers of this research. In particular what was emphasised was how distance education workers worked in teams and their commitment to meaningful commonly held values and what was described as the distance education vision. The purpose of the approach adopted in this stage, as described in chapter 4, was to give voice to how the distance education workers described and understood their work. And what surfaces from these interviews with the distance education workers is the importance of the workers themselves in making distance education work. And as was also reported in chapter 4 there was an ongoing iteration between data gathering, reflection and interpretation. The findings are reported under three broad headings utilising the concepts of community of practice, habitus, and Managerialism all of which grew in significance, and gained explanatory power as the research proceeded. A more detailed examination of these concepts and their meaningfulness to the research is examined in chapter 7.

Thus the chapter is in three parts. In part A: Ways of Working: the Community of Practice, the focus is on how distance education workers work and in what they perceive as different and/or special about the way they work. It focuses on their relationships with colleagues and team work that resonates with the literature on communities of practice as described by Lave and Wenger (1991) and is discussed further in the next chapter. Part (B) reports on their relationship with students - a relationship that gives meaning and value to their work. Both dimensions (A) and (B) suggest emotional involvement with their work or a 'relationship based practice' (Trevithick 2014). In the responses reported in Part (B) the interviewees talked more about their engagement with students in terms not only of what they saw as the importance of their work, but also in terms of their personal work values and ethics as expressed through their work. What might be seen as their distance education habitus. Part (C) reports how

interviewees saw their distance education practice being eroded and stifled by changing managerial practices within the wider university. What Munro (2011), discussing social work, called a 'rational-technical approach' to clients. Reporting the findings in this way mirrored the way the interviewees talked about their work and became most apparent when interviewees started to talk about how they saw their jobs developing. For many in all departments at all three universities, and as reported in chapter 4, this was very traumatic

Part A: Ways of Working: the Community of Practice

All interviewees talked extensively and positively about their work, and in particular how they worked with their distance education colleagues who they respected. They saw how they worked as very different to other departments within the university. All interviewees stressed the distance education team and spirit.

> *'Most academic departments will not be like our academic department 'cos we have academics and administrative and secretarial and support staff and learning development officers who are the distance learning team, who are academic related, who are mostly pretty highly qualified. S has a doctorate in the subject area, M and most of the others have masters in a cognate area, so they are quite well qualified in their fields and so it is like another different group of people in the department. And most academic departments don't have that. There are secretaries and dons – it is much more traditional – and that is what this department does not have…all are treated the same and you don't see the distinctions in the same way as in other departments where I am conscious they are quite delineated'* (AS, Academic university A)

This interviewee went on to say that the distance education team had

'always been quite supportive of not back stabbing in the way lots of academic departments get characterised. You know people fighting over chairs and that kind of thing. …. everybody's equal in a way. You are happy to talk to the porters, the secretaries, and they are all treated the same and you don't see the distinctions in the same way as in other departments where I am conscious they are quite delineated. The secretaries have tea together and the academics just stay in their rooms. So the culture of the department is quite unique.' (AS Academic University A)

One member of the focus group from the same university who had fairly recently left the department to join another setting up distance education made a similar point about the distance education team:

*'I have found going from a very strong team the same applies in my new department because we do everything that relates to DL – academic and administrative – because we do things that are unusual and we support one another very well. Which I would say, and from my husband's experience (*an academic in the same university*), is more than what happens to those teaching on campus. They tend to be more isolated.'* (JJ, Admin University A*)*

Explaining this collegiality and support one member of the focus group maintained that distance education by its very '*nature*' encouraged collaboration:

'But it does have something to do with distance learning – the nature of DL – you do have to collaborate. There is more scrutiny, its more public, there are more quality issues. But this is not the same on campus. Academics in face to face working on their own can deliver a lecture exactly how they wish and

have more freedom in how they do their teaching. This can't be in DL creating learning materials so naturally you have to work as part of a team. This is one of the differences. We do everything together academic and administrative.' (MT, Admin University A)

Or, as a pioneering distance education academic at University C reflected, distance education can't work within the conventional university hierarchies:

'Y*ou need to give much more attention to the administrative and support staff then you do in a regular academic department.'* (CB, Academic University C)

In working in this way everyone, including secretarial staff were involved and, '*can have meaningful jobs because they are empowered to make decisions*.' (DA   Academic University C). RD expressed the role of the administrator in distance education as follows:

'My big thing about the difference between DL and face to face is how admin works. Undoubtedly across all academic admin a great source of satisfaction is support for students. And you get this if they are good. Not all are good – a bad administrator will take it upon themselves to be punishing students all the time. But good administrators see the benefits and rewards in supporting and helping students learn. There is an admin role on campus for that. But in DL this is magnified it is more intense because it is more frequent and often more intimate. It has to be. And because students are isolated they become more emotionally dependent. I don't want to over blow it – it is friendship. And strong relations are built up and this is one of the major sources of satisfaction for a DL administrator. They have their students. And if you are working with people who have a high level of common sense and are pretty centred people this

does not get out of hand. They see it for what it is – a source of satisfaction and they are caring for the progress and success for the people they are dealing with. And they will also be put in a position where they are offering academic advice. When they know they are not academics and nor do they pretend to be so. They offer the benefit of their experience – for example they might say "well I know so and so did this for their dissertation and that was fine". That enriches the role for people doing that kind of work and they get to understand what academics do and because DL academics depend on a strong admin team they get an understanding of the importance of admin and you get a strong sense that things will not work if you do not have a strong admin team. And in a strong sense you have got to let admin give direction to a lot of the decisions academics make.' (RD Academic University C)

MT, RD, CB and DA all stress that this cooperation and team approach was necessary and very much grounded in the need to make distance education work both from a students' and an operational perspective. None of the universities offered any training in distance education administration '*so really it is learning on the job*' (SW Admin University C). This collegial approach was confirmed by another interviewee from University C who joined after distance education was set up. She reported that everything was a '*joint effort*', where everyone works together and '*no one was 'made to do anything but all the work got done.'* She did add, echoing NB one of the international experts who said how challenging it was to recruit the right appropriate academic/admin staff, '*it only works if you have the right people*' (SG, Admin University C). The founding head of this particular distance education department, expressed the same team approach idea, but emphasised the intentionality of creating a team

'We all worked in teams. … You can generate much higher productivity this way. You can stop a lot more mistakes than if

*you are working separately, you can support each other with ideas. As a consequence I had a lot more confidence that decisions would be made in the interests of the outfit as a whole. There is a problem if academics become too wedded to their discipline but (*this is*) not a problem for us. …. Team work was the nature of our distance learning. If an academic was too wedded to their discipline it would not work. We couldn't have people going out to Singapore and saying I am a psychologist, I am only going to do this bit on the module'* (DA, Academic University C)

He stressed that he as the head 'had to walk the talk'. He had to show that team work was valued and had to take everyone's contribution seriously, even if he thought sometimes a contribution amounted to 'petty quibbles', if he was going to have effective team working. So the collegial team did not simply emerge. DA actively steered this by his own example.

All interviewees expressed their affection and attachment for their distance education team, or as one interviewee put it how working with her colleagues '*makes me go into work with a spring in my step'* (JJ Admin Focus group University A.) This team work involved, among other things, trust, friendship, and knowing that the job was done better when working with colleagues.

'We had a very close working relationship with all the people that we worked with overseas. There was a great deal of trust on both sides. We did not think of them as agents. They were our partners. We were a team, working towards the same ends.' (PJ Admin University C)

For PJ trust is key. This did not mean a lack of critical awareness of colleagues' weaknesses but rather a recognition of their strengths and contribution to the whole team. Thus SW described a distance education colleague as

'totally disorganised…you have to organise him..a good friend …(but).. he is totally supportive of the students and passionate about what he does…and students like him because he cares.' (SW Admin University C)

SH, in the quotation bellow, describes the academics as 'staff' suggesting that in other departments academics are set apart from administrative staff and that being 'staff' is important for her '*good feelings*' about distance education work.

'We are a team. All academics are staff in our department. We work closely together. We have regular meetings every month to discuss issues, you know, (and now we have got graduation which I am looking forward to). I like this way of working. It is a good feeling.' (SH Admin University C)

JM suggests, as MT, did that there may well be a structural requirement for close collegial working in distance education. Working together complements and enhances the skills and knowledge held by the different team members. He also suggests that this is enhanced and supported by working in geographic proximity.

'It has always been really good. Well obviously there's been change in individual staff members over the years but, my experience is that we've had a working relationship and a kind of structural relationship between the academic provision of DL or academic staff and the administrative staff that has been really, really good. It's always worked very well….Between us we know what we're doing, but none of us knows everything. So on occasion we'll have to ask Z (administrator*) something or she might ring and ask me about something, but when you're all in the same building and you're a two minutes walk away up or down the stairs or down the corridor, or you just go in to the office to check what's in your tray and you may suddenly*

*engage in conversation with someone, you have that everyday, in many instances, kind of spontaneous, working relationship that just kind of lubricates everything and makes everything work smoothly….the central DL team is a small group of people, and everybody with one or two minor historical exceptions, everybody's got on very well.' (*JM Academic University C*)*

Another factor discussed by interviewees in explaining how they work is that at the beginning they all had to learn on 'the job' about how to make distance education work with little or no help or departmental prior knowledge. Although seen as '*scary*' it helped to cement bonds of trust and was empowering for all involved.   This also implanted a culture of doing, reviewing, improvement and learning. PJ in the two quotations below emphasises that she utilised all her related knowledge and networked with everyone who might help and advise.

'For me it was a very steep learning curve…. It was just like setting up a new business. I learned by doing mostly. I am a quick learner and I listen to people (especially customers!). In the first two years I had a small team who were totally inexperienced but fiercely loyal. We were mutually dependent. I also depended on the knowledge that I gleaned from the Association of MBAs (AMBA), the courses I attended and my own experience as an OU student. I networked with other universities and our overseas partners (particularly those in south east Asia) were very smart and I learned from working with them. I quickly learned to be able to judge what might work and what wouldn't work.' (PJ, Admin University C)

and again

'Materials were being written almost on the hoof for the first round.   As soon as the first set of course modules were complete, the rewrites began and there was constant review and

rewrite. I would be very surprised if all distance learning material wasn't developed in this way. It has to be current. And you are learning all the time to do it better'. (PJ, Admin University C)

Those who joined after the programmes had been set up inherited this on-going development and improvement approach. It was one where '*you were positively encouraged and expected*' to improve and make things run better. Thus one administrator supporting a distance education course at University C and feeling distance education students would benefit from more local support, reported he was '*heavily involved*' in developing the idea and then implementing what he called '*a 360 degree approach to learning*'. He felt students who were potentially isolated would gain much from being in contact with alumni of the course. He had set this up helping

> *'current students by putting them in contact with the alumni so they can form a network for learners. So the students on the course learn from the alumni but the alumni are still involved in the course so that they can keep their learning going as a sort of lifelong learning.'*
> (ML University C)

Another interviewee from the same university expressed her working life as

> *'really hands on, making lots of changes, looking to ways of improving things. Like we just started this whiteboard system - our war board - urgent as well as day to day problems - and looking at innovation. This is what I like. … this is where it may be different, you have to … to be at the forefront. Particularly when it comes to technology.'* (SW, Admin University C)

Both SC and ZA at university C, noted that as a consequence of the connectedness and rapport of the distance education team with each other and

their students they were able to fix problems quickly. The feedback chain was quick and efficient. Thus if e.g. students were struggling with an academic explanation or an assignment did not make sense ZA explained she could spot this and report it to the relevant academic who would '*fix it immediately*' (ZA Admin University C). She got a great sense of achievement from this empowerment to be proactive and find solutions. SC noted that as an academic you could see that if a

> '*student problem linked to the processes, firstly you dealt with it …(and)..secondly, you could actually see what the problem was and actually where it was legitimate you might be able to make some changes. So you dealt with the problem.*' (SC Academic University C)

Being empowered to make decisions that had positive outcomes for students was affirming for the team. Indeed three of the academics interviewed at University C talked about how it had been possible with distance education to gain control over their working lives, free from what was seen as the constraints of their traditional academic departments, and work in the ways they wanted to. Thus RD reported that

> '*Everyone has a story to tell about their involvement with (distance education) … people were escaping from an environment that was not conducive to what they wanted to do and DL provided an environment that they could actually get hold of. I can do this and develop something worthwhile, good for career and gives direction…It forms an escape from a context that was not conducive to development.*' (RD Academic University C)

Similarly an academic at University B admitted that distance education had enabled him and the course manager he worked with, to carve out an area of

postgraduate on and off campus work that they controlled and was contained. And which accorded with his academic and social values.

Interviewees who were in the department from the start and those who joined later emphasised how they learned on the job. Interestingly whilst there are international professional distance education associations that are very active and see their role as embracing advice and support, only three distance education workers from University A had any engagement with these bodies i.e. had been to and/or presented at conferences. None of those interviewed from universities B and C had been involved. (Although one administrator (University B) had recently produced a paper for a university administrators' conference. Her paper was on distance education.) All the interviewees stressed how they learned from their team and all three universities had informal 'go to departments' or 'go to individuals' who were known to have relevant experience and could give advice. At University B the distance education departments operated in isolation and it was only relatively recently, that distance education workers, having 'bumped' into each other at a university meeting decided to meet more regularly. They have regularised this, but it remains an informal group, which

> *'has grown into a monthly meeting at which there's probably, on average, usually about ten of us there, on a Wednesday. And we've done various things where, just as the ten of us, we've sat down. And it can be a mixture of programme managers and administrators for distance learning programmes. Or we've even had people along who are wanting to set up distance learning, and they just want that little bit of support, as to how did you do this and what problems did you come across on the way. And so we've sort of shared practice and shared problems…..So as I say, we've got this nice little support network. We meet on a monthly basis. Sometimes we talk about pedagogy or how do*

> *we deal with induction - just sharing ideas ...'* *(*HD Admin university B)[30]

Reflecting back on their total ignorance about distance education when they started out many felt this ended up as a strength. Allowing them to construct and develop and adapt their distance education model according to their students and their needs as they learned more together. They were learning informally at work from interactions with colleagues as Wenger (1998) describes within the community of practice. Thus PJ (admin University C) quoted above, referred in her interview many times to the learning of the team, e.g.

> *'In the first two years we had a small team who were totally inexperienced and I depended on the team and they did on me….we were seeing what worked and what didn't. And what would fit into University C's way of doing things and what did not. It was trial by doing. Not to say we got it right in the first couple of years but I like to think, I know we didn't all the time, but I like to think we got there.'* (PJ admin University)

PJ went on to describe how the whole team drew on their different experiences and applied them to building distance education at University C. E.g.

> *'I had the background of the OU and as a student I knew the student experience and I knew when I was getting a good service and what I needed from a tutor and what my problems were as a distance learning student. Was a tutor available, could I get an extension on an assignment….?'* (PJ admin University C)

Others in the team were learning e.g. about conducting examinations, doing academic audit, and so forth she said by talking to others - networking within

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[30] University C also had a distance education forum that had been set up with the same intentions.

and outside the university - and '*implementing and reviewing*'. However PJ stressed that it would not have worked if '*we were not working with good people who we could trust.*' (PJ admin University) A theme many interviews reflected, as reported earlier. Thus SG (admin University C) said everyone trusted each other and '*they wanted to work in this way*'. However it was also clear that they were operating within a broadly supportive environment. PJ (Academic University C) talked about the invaluable support they received from key university staff. And at university C a number of respondents, PJ (academic) included, commented favourably on the facilitative attitude of the University Secretary during the set up period (from the late eighties). He was likened to the 'bank manager minding the money'.

> '*I think his willingness to support was so important. He had no interest in how you did it he was not going to interfere at this level. But he might say why don't you try this model as it seems to work for XX. My commitment grew and I gave up the Sub dean role.*' (RD Academic University C)

Another academic at the same university who had set up a distance education programme noted of the same man

> '*He could see what we were trying to do and he was very supportive.*' (DA Academic University C)

The University Secretary at University C provided a permissive and supportive environment protecting the emergent distance education programmes and their ways of working. This role was played by Heads of department in universities A and B when distance education started. And as with university C this was a facilitative approach - providing the 'expansive' environment as described by Unwin and Fuller (2004). Heads of department change and PN described having to get the new Head of School '*on side*', when he knew nothing about distance education.

A key issue, that was common to all distance education workers in all of the departments in all three universities, was their sense of having to deal with 'The University'. Or to 'work around' it. This made them as a distance team feel different to workers in face to face provision and cemented their sense of a community of distance educators who shared common work practices, and participation within this community created meaning and identity for them.

> *'We definitely have administrative problems. I think HD likes to say it's square pegs in round holes. Yeah because obviously we have four intakes a year in distance learning, and the university systems are only built to deal with one'* (RO Admin University B)

RO, a new administrator in the distance education department, illustrated this with the case of a new student who had received the generic e mail sent to all new students. This leads him (student) to contact RO and query whether he needs a visa since he is a distance education student and will not be visiting the UK. RO went on to explain that in this generic letter there was all kinds of extraneous information about '*accommodation and things like that*' and it is really hard for the student to find the information that is relevant - which all leads to confusion and contact with her.

> *'yeah, in terms of that it's not set up very well for distance learning'.*(RO Admin University B)

'Work around' was a common phrase many used for this situation to find a solution that works for an individual distance education student. University B used BANNER[31] for student records, which was not devised for distance education. To get over this major problem HD reported their team had created their own local data base

[31]BANNER is a comprehensive computer information system that contains information on courses, students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Additional components of the system may include student financial aid, finance, human resources, and alumni.

*'..where we keep all of our students and any modules they've already taken, student choices and so on. We keep information on this data base, and it links through to Banner in terms of grades. So I can look on that (local) system to see how the students are progressing…it's just an internal database… I wouldn't say it's an easy thing but because, as a team we've been working on it, working together for a long time, we know the system and we know how to deal with it. Work around it. So I'm not saying it's straightforward. Some of the systems don't work very well, so as I say, BANNER stores everything, but then, at the end of somebody's studies, the classification tool which calculates the final grade doesn't work. Because you've got students having done it in all different funny orders and it can't calculate the final classification.' (*HD Admin University B)

Creating their own distance education data base was something all distance education departments had had to do to enable them to manage their student data. This

*'meant our data base was built to respond to our requirements. It was not imposed upon us which we may or may not have been allowed to modify. In fact a lot of other departments copied us. … These people (*who create the data base*) don't get recognised. None of the admin is recognised because fundamentally the University do not value the enterprise.' (*DA academic University C) [32]

Indeed having a departmental data base became a source of conflict for some departments within the wider university - especially IT departments. Local data bases enabled 'work around'. The data base DA described set the unofficial distance education gold standard at university C for how a distance education

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[32] DA told me in conversation how he had come across some years later a version of his departments distance education data base at another university and was told how it had come from his department. He had retired by then. This data base was a site of contestation at University C and was eventually disallowed by the university in its 'one size fits all' approach.

data base should work allowing them to also keep integrated records on their students and part time tutors. Designing and updating these data bases also had an effect of reinforcing the distance education team as they discussed the requirements and modifications needed to their data base. Further reinforcing their sense of difference from the university which they saw could not/would not respond to what they needed which at the same time reinforced their identity as a team. As HD described it:

> *'a team of us and yeah, we're all just, we're all talking. We have coffee together, we meet up. We have a very good working relationship all of us so there's good communication.' (*HD Admin University B)

Distance education workers all talked positively about their working lives and their '*very close knit DL team*' (HD Admin University B) which worked cooperatively and collegially. All considered that their working culture was not only different to the main university culture but was also not wholly approved of at more senior levels in the university. (This was mentioned by interviewees at both universities A and C where major reorganisations impacting on distance education were taking place.)

> *'But it is not viewed as a positive culture in the university. Because it is a bit too friendly - having tea – fraternising, not appearing to do work.* (AS Academic university A*)*

At University C a distance education academic observed that these more democratic forms appear to some senior university managers as though '*no one is in charge*'. These ways of working helped to cement the view all held that they were a community set apart from the wider university.

In their daily lived working lives distance education workers conception of themselves as a different community was continuously reaffirmed. As has been referred to earlier a critical issue related to university wide regulations and

systems that were designed for on campus full time undergraduates which '*we are pushed all the time to conform to*' and 'so *we are manipulating the regulations to fit DL students all the time.' (*SW Administrator University C.*)

> *'…. not only is it war zones or hurricanes or…we have heard it, and we try and work round peoples' situations. Yes, lots of illness, lots of bereavements. You name it, we've heard it. …we are fighting systems all the time. You know, somebody at student registration saying "no you can't give a retrospective extension like that" well, actually I think you'll find that Hurricane Katrina went through and that's why they didn't email us. "Yes but you can't…" You know, so there are lots of things like that.' (*PN Academic University B*)

The distance education workers interviewed reported becoming adept at finding ways around the regulations, forging alliances with individual staff in the relevant central university offices - e.g. registry and finance - and advocating and fighting for their students. This reinforced a sense of collective identity and solidarity - they were part of the wider university but separate and distinct from it. Battling against it on behalf of their students. Or as JN said in frustration at the system (and laughter in the forum):

> *'Our students are not chickens or ruminants so we have to stick with people in our department.'* (JN Admin, forum University A)

Dramatic examples were told by all and related to the common problem all had in protecting their students from the impact of regulations regarding late submission of assignments. Regulations that might make sense for full time young undergraduates but hardly made sense for adults working in demanding jobs (in these cases a soldier fighting in Afghanistan and an aid worker working in disaster support in the Caribbean).

*We've got our relationship with the institution, which is mixed, there's nothing worse than an email "the new university policy is…". … So we've got to do our version of…it's not a grass-roots up kind of thing in this instance because we are fighting the system because the system probably can't get it right for distance learning forever, and if you were starting to design a custom system, you'd never capture it. It has to be incredibly flexible, but we're fighting the system.' (*PN Academic University B)

All the distance education workers in all the distance education departments had devised strategies to 'work around' the consequences of the rigid interpretation of these regulations for their students - usually de-registration and failure - and preserve flexibility that they felt was integral to distance education programmes. Whilst the task of handling such issues may fall to one member of the team, knowing they had the support of their colleagues reinforced what a number of interviewees called their 'distance learning spirit'.

This continual butting up against the university on regulations sustained a belief that all interviewees shared that institutionally 'the university' lacked understanding of, and sympathy for, distance education students, who unlike conventional students were adults, studying part time, and juggling the often conflicting demands of work, family and study. And critically were not on campus. At university C this point was illustrated by a number of interviewees who reported that a PVC (who had in her portfolio distance education) had stated that extensions to assignments for distance education students could be seen as unfair to full time students who did not get extra time. And one interviewee, after the interview was formally over, reported that a senior member of the administration had told her that they did not wish to recruit students who did not fit the institutional requirements regarding progression - i.e. those who needed flexibility built into their studies and who might thus take longer to complete and thereby negatively impact the university wide date on completion rates.

This institutional inability to handle distance education students, and the consequences for the work of distance education workers was well illustrated by MK reporting admissions processes at university   B where there is a requirement that the university sees the original degree certificates. Because for a taught post graduate programme the entry requirement is generally based on their original undergraduate degree. So the university requires that it sees the original certificate of that degree or a certified copy.

'The problem is that the copy can only be certified by the awarding university and not by a notary or somebody else you might expect to be OK. This is easier if you are going to be here in person and show it to the appropriate person and then take it away, because they can be quite valuable documents – at least sentimentally. Also it may not be a problem if it is not very long since you did your first degree but if, as it often is with our students, it is thirty years since you did your first degree and you did it on another continent from where you are now working, or your certificate is now framed on the wall in your office because you are a doctor and it was your medical degree it is quite difficult. There are obviously good reasons to be strict and to ensure that the students are who they say they are and have the qualifications that they say that they have. …. but the main problem we have is why can't we accept something certified by somebody other than the issuing institution. It seems particularly inflexible. … Our faculty management are sympathetic … but there was no budging, but I think that now we have a cross faculty group [33]we are making headway. … So that is an example where there has not been much flexibility. Other things there usually is but there is an extra step involved. The procedure might not be very flexible and might not really work for the distance learner but once you get on the phone and

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[33]The informal distance education group described above.

speak to student administration or fees or whoever and explain there is usually a 'work around' it. And that is fine but it tends to have to be done on a student by student basis which is obviously time consuming because it means you have to do the phoning and the speaking and they have to do whatever they have to do on their particular system to implement that issue. And some things are just because the IT systems have not been set up, when they were set up, nobody thought how would this work for DL. Our student information data base has a field to record if a student is part time and that impacts on other things. And you can also record if a student is a DL student. But you can't do both at the same time. So there have been some unexpected issues – quite minor – with people's records not being correct because one entry has over ridden another entry. So we have to go in and manually change this for all students. Once you are aware of it you have to go in and change it for students. It is not difficult but it would be better if it did not happen at all.' (MK Academic University B)

Commenting on the consequences of all this for her job, MK notes, that equivalent colleagues in face to face

'… just would not have to know those things. If all of the students can be dealt with by standard procedures then usually that would just get done so you would not have to know or understand too much about exactly what is involved. Whereas to make sure things happen for the DLers you do have to know. Thus frequently what happens is a student will contact us and report an issue and then we will have to work out what is going on. We have to understand what should happen and finding out why is this not happening for this particular student, and like I say contacting those people in central services who otherwise you might not need to speak to and trying to get those things

resolved. It does give you more integration in a way into those central university teams. Because it means asking people to do a little more work you have to try and form relationships with people so that you know if you ring such and such in that office they will be very helpful and they will sort it out for you: Because I am going on maternity leave my handover, probably the key information is who to ring in these departments to get the help or whatever you need. So yeh that is quite important.' (MK Academic University B)

It was these kinds of institutional approaches to distance education students, which as MK shows, start from admissions and continue throughout the distance education students study, contributed to distance education workers interviewed seeing themselves as different to other education workers on campus - a community of workers seeking to support their students.

Thus far this difference between other modes and distance education has been described in terms of the responses the interviewees gave to the doing of their distance education work. Broadly this can be summarised as the workers all saw themselves as a distinct entity having a sense of themselves as different to face to face workers. They shared a common view regarding their relationship to the university - marginal and unacknowledged. They worked collegially and in non hierarchical, democratic teams based on trust and mutual interdependence. They described themselves as continuously learning and improving what they did and felt 'empowered' to act, frequently circumventing university rules and regulations on behalf of their students as MK did. This way of working can be called a distance education community of practice. In that this group of people share common relationships and an identity around their work that represents a 'collective intention', (which is often tacit), around a domain of knowledge and experience about distance education and which sustains their desire to continuously learn about it.

That they are a distinct group with a distinct collegial way of working may be an aspect of distance education as many interviewees suggested. And certainly this distinctiveness is captured by one academic at university C who described a permanent member of the central administration at his university handing in her notice, and moving to a less secure contract, to join the distance education team in his department because she liked the way they worked and because after working at the university for 15 years joining a distance education team was the first time anyone had '*asked her to think*'. The phrase 'work around', which many of the respondents used to describe their relationship to wider university systems and processes, suggests the marginal position of distance education to mainstream provision but it is when distance education workers talked about 'their' students, explaining what they do on their behalf, and why they advocated so strongly for them, a deeper sense of their identity as distance education workers emerges. And how it came to be that distance education was developed and sustained. This is captured by ML when he talked about what made him get up and go to work:

> *'The spirit of my immediate colleagues, working with the students and knowing that it has some impact on the world. I am interested in development economics, international development, and I know to an extent we are having a big impact on those areas where people work in. And knowing that it is having some impact in the world and development issues especially made me want to join the team and carry on working and trying to keep positive about it.' (*ML Admin University C)

Part b. Ways of working: the distance education habitus

Everyone interviewed stressed a focus on and a commitment to distance education students. Or as PS expressed it:

> *I think the collegiate nature of the work is very much driven by a shared strong sense of student centred focus. This means*

people want to help students, and want students to do well. People will step into a gap and will help someone do the thing they need to do because the focus is on getting the materials right for the students or getting the support or delivery right. This might not be the case in other modes I would hazard a guess.' (PS Admin Focus group University A)

All interviewees talked about students with warmth and considerable knowledge - even though invariably they had not met face to face. Indeed it was engagement with 'their' students, who were reported as frequently juggling complex demands of work and family life, that was seen as making distance education work worthwhile. Indeed PN observed it was precisely because their students are adults, with all the complexity that involves, that

> *'just about everybody is on an individual programme of some kind'* (PN academic University B)

There were 'two values we were conscious of', said one academic:

> *There was valuing the learner. And the value of the learning experience. And it was our responsibility to make that the best learning experience possible for people, who were coming to it later in life, working full time, under difficult circumstances; we had to be very understanding about extensions of deadlines, and things like that. We had to be very understanding. A good proportion were abroad, many were foreign - learning in a second language - so we had to be very good on that.'* (DA Academic University C)

DA did not consider, despite the rhetoric, that valuing the learner was important in the wider university.

'I was very dissatisfied by the way in which some of my colleagues in the university treated students…there was a group who did not have much respect for the students. And that's why I wanted everyone in our outfit to call our students course members to think of them as equals.' (DA Academic University C)

These values were illustrated in the knowledge of and empathy for distance education students all interviewees demonstrated. This was explained as an inevitable outcome of distance education students taking longer to complete their studies than their campus equivalents and that throughout this journey they (the distance education workers) engage and support their students. This support covers the inevitable lows of studying at a distance, the problems encountered by an inappropriate university administrative system where invariably distance education students are 'exceptions' and have to be treated individually as MK described, and the impact on study progress of family and work life. SH talked proudly about how she gets to know students and how the students become familiar to her.

'I know their names. Everyone calls me the queen of the names… ….with us you get to know students before they start and you have got a name to name – so you don't call them like Mr. Bloggs or whatever you know them by first names. Which is really nice. I like that. It is funny to say but they become like friends. And at the end they thank you. They are not like students but more like friends and colleagues. You are trying to get them to get what they want at the end of their degree…. I like that interaction. I don't want to call them Mr. Bla bla or Mrs. Bla bla. I think it is nice to have this kind of interaction and then the e mail sort of changes. At the start it is all formal and then it gets like you are asking how the weather is, how the baby is ... At the beginning it is like getting them on the course, paying the money, but once they are on you support them differently.'

*(*SH Administrator University C*)*

The administrators in distance education in particular play many roles - not covered in any job description but critical to doing the job. All described the need for empathy. The many aspects of the educational counselling role[34] of a distance education worker are described by SW. Sometimes

'you have to be disciplinarian to try to keep them on track….but equally you have to be the supportive voice when they are having a bit of a flutter and they are not sure they can do it, and support them and say they can do it when they are having a personal crisis and they ring you and are crying on the phone. One of the people who graduated in January, and it was one of the reasons I so wanted to go, part way through, I mean she started the course as a very shy, withdrawn and retiring person, but she was competent, she had two small children, I think they were about 4 and 18 months when she started the course dealing with that, and then her husband left her part way through and she still managed to finish. It was quite a messy divorce, I knew all that background, but it didn't interfere and I was so thrilled to get her through. She worked really hard. Stories like that keep you going and I think if you didn't have empathy for people I think it would mean people like her wouldn't get through. Having me at the end of the phone when she was upset and uncertain saying "this is not the right thing for me to be doing", having me at the end of the phone to listen and encourage and keep her on track is important. If you didn't have empathy you couldn't do it. … when it is not face to face it is much more intense, some people might be a little more open with e mail – so if you are up in the morning at 3 am in the middle of something, struggling, they can be really quite honest and say more, this is the strength of e mail - a different form of

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[34] A term the Open University used see Open Teaching, and one common in adult education practice.

communication. Equally some may not reveal things in writing but will do so on the phone.' (SW Administrator University C)

Thus SW and other interviewees understood that their work helped students to succeed. Indeed it was core - being a friend, a counsellor, an advocate, even a disciplinarian. SW described this as '*getting **her** student through*'. She personally identified with   distance education students. And this personal relationship was what all interviewees emphasised and valued in what they did. Like SW all those interviewed felt that supporting *their* distance education students involved understanding the affective aspect of learning being *'the supportive voice'*. For the students there was usually no one else. They were isolated. Reflecting on this reality for distance education students, SG (Administrator University C), also likened the role of the administrator in distance education to that of a counsellor. Commenting on the distance education administrators in her department she reported that they frequently got letters saying

> *'were it not for you I would not have survived the course. You do things that other staff in the university don't do.'(* SG Administrator University C)

Similarly PN commented that seeing 'some of the dedications in peoples' dissertations demonstrated this. They thank the distance education worker(s) who supported them. He went on to say *'it is heart-rending'* but it is '*symptomatic of distance learning*'. For, PN said, unlike their face to face full time equivalents who are at the university for a year or even with undergraduates who are at the university for three years:

> **'***Sure the shit hits the fan … People aged eighteen to twenty-one /twenty-two, you know, mum and dad might have an illness, granny might die. All those sorts of things, they do happen, because a set of people are around for several years. That gets exaggerated with our distance learners because they are often*

in parts of the globe which are more challenging places to live
than downtown X or whatever, and they are on the books for
anything from three to five years, …. And we do get a ….
withdrawal (s), and often regretful withdrawals,   simply
because life circumstances are just getting too much. We are
coping with that as well.' (PN Academic University B)

Being a supportive and empathetic voice is unavoidable, a requirement of distance education, PN suggests. For not only are distance education students adults with busy lives, they may also be working and living in demanding situations. He notes that sometimes a student withdrawal follows after a period of harrowing e mails and sometimes

'it's a sealed envelope situation…we all know what's gone on ..
*we (*distance education team*) talk to each other. That's the team*
*caring for the carers.' (*PN Academic University B*).*

These situations he reports are truly upsetting and the distance education team gets through by supporting each other, whilst often having to intervene and protect the students from the university administration when at these times,

'Some arse at the university sends them a letter saying, you
know, you've got a library fine, if you don't pay this two pence,
you're out on your ear mate.' (PN Academic University B)

The interviewees maintained that knowing their students as they do - often knowing quite intimately their personal circumstances - offer a buffer to faceless bureaucratic administration. And that since distance education students study, often in isolation to others, the standard unmediated university processes frequently discourage and overwhelm them. The interviewees felt strongly that their student focus meant they offered a more human, student centred approach. The focus group at university A discussing this issue felt it was not

just an administrative issue but the fundamental difference between face to face and distance education.

> *This is just one example of the mismatch between conventional full-time university teachers and their attitudes to students. It's just one of those things that they haven't quite grasped about DL. It's not surprising – but it keeps surprising us – we have been doing it for 20 years and still, unless they are actually involved in it, they don't get all the different parts of it because they don't think about it. They think "oh yes. Let's do some DL, anyone can do DL", but until they are actually doing it, it does not really sink in about all the repercussions of all the different elements.* (JN Administrator University A)

SG (University admin University C) noted that this support for distance education students meant that the distance education team automatically did things that administrators in conventional higher education would not do. She reported for instance an example of this when she met a student who worked for the UN who was temporarily in the UK. She met him on the motorway so he could hand in his course work on time. She noted that of course this student focused approach also had other benefits - it helped recruit students. Their student orientation or '*customer focus*', as SG sometimes called it in her interview, gets known about and since they are offering courses in a particular department to those working in that field it served as excellent marketing. This was a beneficial spin off from what she called their deep rooted respect for their students.

> *'"Oh yes I heard of your department how fantastic it was". I hear this all the time.' When ex-students come and visit – even after 10 years – you were my administrator. We know their families and when they are having babies. Invited to weddings. It is so personal. .. The University doesn't have this ethos. DL needs Customer service. It (university) doesn't understand this. ..When*

*you're dealing with a working mother with two children trying to do masters surely you have nothing but respect for that women and you want to help her. We have had women come in here, and we ask them how do they work out their time, e.g. one women had twins, she came in here … And I asked her how had she done it' and she said well the quietist time is 5 o'clock in the morning. So I get up at 5 o'clock in the morning. It is all things like that. I couldn't do it.You can have nothing but respect.'(*SG Administrator University C)

Respect for the distance education students was a theme of all interviewees.

'I take my hat off to every one of them, because what they achieve whilst doing other things and…Some of them live in very difficult parts of the world, where they're physically in danger, and they're still studying and they're still submitting their work on time. And they might not have internet access all of the time, and yet they still get their work in, and I'm absolutely amazed at them.' (HD Admin University B)

SG argued that because the core of distance education was student focused it required different types of people to work in it. It was imperative that they were empathetic and kind.

'They have to be caring. We recruit for this. That is more important than knowledge or skill. You can be taught a skill but you can't teach someone to care. I mean you will find admin staff in here any time between say 8 in the morning and 7 in the evening, you will find them on a Saturday. You will find admin staff sweeping the floor, cleaning the toilets, because if we have got students coming in[35] we all care. It is definitely different. I have had people; they speak to students over Christmas. If they

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[35] This department ran weekend schools

*are on leave they are always in touch.....Most of them will do their e mails when they are on leave. If a student they know needs help they will try and help whatever the time of day or night. They ferry them about when they come over. Take them to the train station. We just do it because we get to know our students.'(*SG Administrator University C*)*

For SG caring was core to the service ethic and core to the values of distance education.   And that this was a commonly held view is reflected in SC's comments about distance education which

'..doesn't become a car crash, because individual members of staff who do DL they are the most dedicated staff I've ever come across in the university. I mean, often, to the detriment of their health, quite often, I've seen it happen so often, because I don't know if people, academics who are empathetic get involved in DL or they become empathetic because of the nature of the students. I don't know which way around it is….it certainly grips you, particularly if you meet them… I spent a lot of time in Africa, you know, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria[36] and you meet the students there and you realise they're hardworking, smart, dedicated but just distant, and for many years presumed to be second rate students because they produce second rate material because the weren't getting much support. But of course once they get support they are not second rate. So you get involved, once you meet them, and you go and teach out there you realise that for these students who, and of course the fees are such these days that an African student is probably paying not far off a British student or a European student, they're the same cost…' (SC Academic University C)

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[36] This department had a number of different models for going to the country where students studied - workshops, tutorials, weekend schools etc - what they did depended on where they had students.

SC implies in this extract that many in the university not engaged in distance education hold distance education students in disdain. A point which will be revisited. In this extract from SC's interview he was also highlighting his core belief that providing support to students studying through distance education enables distance education students to achieve. This for respondents was seen as a moral responsibility since distance education is primarily concerned with access and for this to be meaningful (i.e. for students to achieve) these disadvantaged students need support. PJ similarly reflected on the responsibilities of those in distance education for giving

'… students the opportunity to have the learning experience that they could not get through the standard root either in their country or overseas, because of money, class or whatever, and it is incumbent upon those who provide DL, to do their darnedest to ensure what they are imparting to their DL students is as close to the experience of coming to the university as a full time student. I know it is not perfect, and you can't replicate it absolutely but the quality of the education that is being passed on and the support of staff - the admin and academic - well I think it should be better for DL students. Full time students if they can't find it one way they will find it another. DL students need 100% support because they can't find it in same way.' (PJ Admin University C)

PS put the centrality of student support as the source of his greatest satisfaction given the huge hurdles distance education students had to overcome:

'Supporting students and seeing them succeed especially when you have been able to help when they might have been at risk of failing. Supporting students who have got significant personal or mental health issues that are difficult for them to manage and seeing them succeed at the end.' (PS Admin University A)

A number of interviewees likened, as SG did, this student support to customer service. Providing good customer service which was centred on the student (customer) expressed a core distance education work ethic. MT focused on the usage of the concept 'customer service' in distance education and how this has now entered the discourse of higher education but with a somewhat different nuance.

'But this goes back to the original point of the student in DL being a customer which is something that we have assumed in distance learning because distance learning students have always paid a fee and have always paid for service, and a product. And there are loads of arguments/misconceptions around that aren't there. There are different notions of what a customer is. People with a traditional viewpoint on campus …. they imagine a typical student is 18 to 25 years old and have a focus on facilities whilst in DL I would say the focus has been on the product and support because you don't need to provide facilities in the same way. But it is interesting that the idea of the student as customer has come into on campus or full time traditional but in doing so it has changed the way it is manifested. It is different to how it is viewed in DL. Even though it is more like you are paying 9 grand, we give you a service. I think it is interesting.' (MT administrator University A)

Perhaps customer came readily to mind for interviewees as all the distance education departments from inception had to cover their costs[37] and essentially operate as a business. They charged fees. This caused some tension with ideas of access but enhanced concerns about appropriately supporting students and ensuring value. PJ noted that there

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[37]Actual costs for distance education departments are not too difficult to ascertain - but most universities sought to charge distance education departments for facilities, services and infra structure they did not use - e.g. gyms, counselling, buildings - which inevitably damaged their capacity to generate 'profit' at the rate expected especially since they still had to buy, from their fee income items specific to distance education - e.g. design, development and delivery (paper or electronic) of teaching resources. This amounted to a tax on distance education students. And in effect meant distance education students subsidised campus students.

> *'were two underlying principles that we worked to. One was that everything we did had to be of the highest quality. So that in no way were we cheating on our students. Because these students were paying considerable sums of money to do a distance MBA. And we had met these students and continued to meet them[38], and when you talked to them you realised that even in places like Singapore and Malaysia the price of the MBA was at least equivalent to a year's income. And as a Yorkshire friend of mine said these kids have sold a kidney to do your MBA. It put it in dramatic terms and brought home the point.'* (PJ Academic University C)

Reflecting further on this PJ went on to describe providing a quality service as a 'moral obligation'. He described how the fathers of one group of students from Turkey

> *'had invested their entire pension fund into their fees. This puts lots of things in perspective – these students were taking big risks to invest in their future, in their human capital, and we had a moral obligation to ensure that what we were delivering was of the highest quality.'* (PJ Academic University C)

Fee levels, that might negatively impact on access, was a major concern for distance education workers as university managements simultaneously sought to increase fees, increase the departmental top slice for 'university costs' and to reduce the support offered to students. This concern was rooted in values and beliefs that emphasised the importance of education both for the individual and society as is illustrated by PJ, PN and ML.

> *'I was becoming interested in adult ed. Here we were dealing with people who were looking for a second chance. … DL was*

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[38] This distance education department offered regional workshops in various countries where their distance education programme was offered.

about giving people a second chance.Giving them career development.' (PJ Academic University C)

*'There is the altruistic side of it…and you say why do you do that. Well we're (*universities*) supposed to educate we're supposed to train, we're supposed to pass it on. Yeah there is demand for what we're doing so that's a reason to do it, that there aren't that many people who are doing this kind of thing, and that if people in other places want to learn these kinds of techniques, which are useful, one's belief is that they've got to learn it somewhere or other.'* (PN Academic University B).

'I got into DL because I did a degree and master's degree in development economics …and I was interested in operational issues which is linked to supporting people who work in that field. So I wanted to find a job that would give me experience supporting people who are working out in the field dealing with development issues and disaster management and promoting stability in countries was closely related to that. … That's why I joined the university. And I have tried to help the university address some of the learning issues that people in developing countries face.' (ML admin University C)

PN went on to report that their beliefs about the role of education, as with a number of the distance education masters programmes from the three universities, led them to recruit students who did not have first degrees. They were providing an opportunity for those who had relevant experience in the workplace but no degree. This desire was being thwarted by the administration and the university system and processes.

How can we possibly expect both the VLE[39] type things, and other colleagues to understand this? … We are looking for some kind of compensation: they've been in the work place .. and we will try and find and get an example of their writing, … perhaps distance learning, we'd probably sign them up for one or two modules to see how they got on….(PN academic university B)

It should not be concluded that all interviewees started with a developed value system that focused on students. Rather this developed as a consequence of contact with the students and working in the distance education team as JJ reported:

*'To be honest my motivation for taking up the post was more the technology. I didn't really think about the students at that point. I thought it looked like a really interesting job with a lot of desk top publishing which I was quite interested in doing. My values were not the teams' values in the beginning …..But I started to have contact with students and seeing the difference it made to their careers and self-confidence. It was thrilling. Just getting to know them as people and realising that what I was doing at a computer on my own wasn't just for my own enjoyment but was actually impacting on real people and felt more of a connection to real students and I have carried this through to my present job where I am a personal tutor. And that is an aspect I really enjoy' (*JJ Admin Focus group University A*)*

The distance education workers interviewed conveyed a commitment to their students and what they as distance education workers felt they needed to do to support them and ensure their studies were successful. In expressing their commitment they articulated both their purpose and beliefs about distance education and doing their jobs within distance education appropriately and with

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[39] VLE/Virtual Learning Environment. PN is referring to the technological scanning and first sort of applications done centrally that would typically reject such an application.

integrity. They held a clear set of values relating to distance education that were continuously addressed, and informed and reaffirmed in their daily work. Interviewees were thereby able to give a coherent account of what they did and why it was important, which they all shared, and gave them an individual and collective strength of purpose when they found themselves having to 'take on' the wider university system and address the negative views they felt were held about distance education and distance education students. A negativity SC described as the 'othering' of distance education.

> *'..in terms of, um, status it doesn't fit because, at departmental level it's always 'othered'. People always assume, and sometimes explicitly say, that the content is second rate, that the students are third rate, and it's certainly not given priority. Yet my experience ….. is that DL students are just as good…'* (SC Academic University C)

SC illustrated the lack of interest in distance education among academic colleagues by his experience on exam boards where

> *'….basically the emphasis would be on, "Well really interested in the full time programme, go through those", and the Distance Learning ones well, they were just a pile of paper really. And they weren't individuals (the distance education students), they weren't, and so I felt that there wasn't any interest.'* (SC Academic University C)

The distance education students were unknown to most campus administrative and academic staff. They were not involved in distance education and were not interested in it interviewees reported. Reinforcing their perception of the difference between campus and distance education and the need to protect distance education for if they did not support distance education's students who would?

The distance education workers interviewed displayed what can be called a distance education habitus. A set of dispositions that internalises support for their distance education students. Through their daily work practices supporting their students, working with their distance education colleagues, and encounters with the university systems and processes, their distance education habitus is reproduced and nuanced. To the distance education workers it seems 'natural' that they should act in the way they do, and if questioned might emphasise that it is the ethical way to be when distance education students have been recruited and have paid their often quite substantial fees. Also they may well refer to the wider 'social good' of providing education to those otherwise denied access to study for whatever reason. It had been possible for them to work in this way because in the years in which distance education developed in campus universities there was a more laissez faire approach to departmental management. Academic departments were able to develop their distance education programmes by running small, entrepreneurial businesses. This situation could hardly be described as the mainstreaming of distance education as many distance education theorists suggested. Rather distance education workers made distance education work by working around the university and by their overriding commitment to their students and co-workers. These programmes ran alongside regular departmental campus based programmes.

However it became apparent during the research that for many distance education workers things were changing rapidly and the *'golden days of distance education'* that they portrayed so eloquently were over. 'Working around' was becoming more and more difficult as both university processes and structures changed.

Part C. Ways of working: the impact of university wide managerial changes on distance education.

Interviewees talked at length about the changes in their university that were undermining both their distance education work practices and their ability to support their students in the way they felt was appropriate and ethical. A

number of them felt disenchanted and expressed feelings of loss and even depression.

During the period of the research many universities were undergoing significant organisational changes in the name of efficiency, innovation and change. This has been written about extensively (see chapter 8 and referred to in chapter 3 and 4). These organisational changes impacted on distance education in the research sites. Some of the negative consequences have resulted from, for example, moving all administrators for distance education who were once in academic departments and responsible and accountable to academic departments, into larger faculty/college or university wide administrative units or 'hubs' that were geographically separated from their academic departments and providing advice and guidance to a range of programmes and courses across the college or indeed wider university. Also the common practice of non replacement and/or 'restructuring' of distance education departmental administrative posts. These reorganisations began to break down the distance education community of practice and its collegiality and team work. University wide integrated IT systems underpinning organisational changes and combined with embedded 'quality' assurance procedures made it more and more difficult to run distance education administration from within departments with a benign student focused 'work around'. That is there was one regulation covering all students regardless of mode of study and this was structured into the IT system. Distance education courses had in some instances to be redesigned and restructured to fit university wide regulations about completion times, including the number of course starts per calendar year and assignment extensions were codified and imposed on all campus and distance education provision. Thus undermining the myriad ways distance education workers had devised to make '*square pegs fit into round holes*' (RO admin University B) to ensure flexibility of study for their students. Whilst many interviewees recognised the need for some change to administrative processes the impact of the changes challenged a core belief of distance educators that everything should be designed around, and responsive to, the student and their needs rather than the requirements of the system. The distance education habitus was challenged. In addition

changes in higher education were affecting academic working conditions (see Chapter 8). The ever increasing audit and performance measurement culture that privileged research above all other contributions an academic might make, made participation in distance education if not impossible a very unwise career choice, as PJ (academic University C) stressed forcefully.

In University C where distance education is moving towards being managed in distance education hubs, departmental distance education administrators during the research were being moved to these hubs and required to work on reactive 'advice' and 'guidance' for students across all college distance education programmes, devoid of contact with academics, and reporting to line managers outside the department.

This they said amounted to a considerable loss of autonomy and authority to direct their own work. The big unit (hub) is assumed, interviewees said, to be more efficient and cost effective. For the distance education workers it meant that the relationship between distance education workers and distance education students has been fractured - 'customer' service, which the distance education teams proudly espoused, was being narrowly defined as prompt response rates to students rather than proactive learner centred support. And for the distance education workers this meant the significant relationships with students that had been so key to giving meaning to their work was destroyed. An administrator who was about to be placed in the hub said

> *'it's a call centre - everyone supposed to know all the courses and regulations…Everything…I'm not sure how it will work for administrators to have knowledge of everything (all distance education courses)… and from my point of view I think it is kind of a mission impossible thing - …doing everything for the whole college. But here (in her distance education team) we try to provide a personal service to our students, there is a lot of interaction with the students and all that – so there is a lot of job satisfaction in knowing them all, but I don't think anyone's going*

to be able to do that because of the volume of students in the hub - its just not going to be possible. The staff currently working in the hubs – what they're saying is – they're just replying to one e-mail after another.' (ZA Admin University C)

This arrangement of centralised distance education meant the demise of the role of the distance education administrator(s) within the department providing informed proactive support. One interviewee maintained that the university management did not understand the difference between the role of the distance education administrator and the general university administrator.

*'I don't think the (*university*) managers understand the difference – they don't follow up on the students or anything – it's really up to the students - it's left up to the student to do the work and to submit the work and finish the course on time – you know – they wouldn't get the support that they got from the departments.'* (SG Admin University C)

Relationships developed with distance education students over their whole student journey and which distance education workers felt gave meaning to their work - made them '*go the extra mile*' - ZA believed were not possible in the new 'hub' environment. Interviewees felt this critical aspect of distance education, over the entire time the student was studying and that ultimately stopped students dropping out, was not understood by those transforming the university. JM argued that the university management had no understanding of the requirements of distance education:

'Sometimes I get thankful emails, when somebody graduates, saying thanks for all your help, you know, nothing out of the ordinary. But they get cards in the office as well saying, you know, thanks for all your help over the years, you know, personalised. It's not just to 'the office', it's to Z or to A or the others. I can't imagine that happening when they're in the hub,

and really at a distance, if you're studying, it seems to me, if you're studying at a distance, then that kind of personal relationship matters more than if you're actually studying here on campus. Because you have a whole raft of other relationships, you know, around you that may be more significant. But if you're studying on your own in a village, in the back end of nowhere, the fact that you've got someone with a name who can help you with an essay, and someone with a name who can help you with your deadlines and all your admin stuff, that must be invaluable…

But that kind of, I think that kind of supporting, personalised relationship, with individual learners at a distance, I think a lot of that's going to be lost, because decisions for moving people to the hub, it seems to me, the rationale for that, that's decided by an accountant somewhere. Not someone who's had twenty years, you know, someone who has DL experience. …

It's an accountant or it's a manager, it's an instrumental, functional, managerial decision, which I'm sure will save money. Well, I don't know… but I'm sure there's an economy of scale putting everybody in the hub,…They can get rid of people, which is what they are doing by the look of things. You can have a smaller number of people in a central hub, and have that smaller number, so a smaller wage bill, administer everything that they did before, when you had groups of people in departments, which in total was a larger number of people. So you can administer all the same number of programmes, centrally, with a smaller number of people. So there's an efficiency there. It's an institutional efficiency. It's an accounting efficiency, but that efficiency ends there. It's not efficiency, I don't think it's efficient in terms of my, what I understand, the kind of relationship you

want to develop between the institution and the people that are studying at a distance.' (JM Academic University C)

For JM therefore these changes were driven by assumptions about a cost efficiency and introduced by people who he considered had no knowledge of distance education and how it worked. He questioned the definition of efficiency, '*an accounting efficiency*', that failed to understand the human relationships that were fostered by the distance education workers with their students and that led to the success of distance education students. For JM these were the relationships that kept students going and ensured they were successful. Student achievement with a good experience did not figure in the accountant's view of cost efficiency. Another interviewee also argued that the senior management cared little and knew even less about distance education and this was he said, the reason why the decisions they made relating to distance education were so '*mad*',

> *'It has gone into a bureaucratic management overkill that is stifling everything'.* (MF Academic University C)

Illustrating the ignorance about distance education MF described a situation where he was chastised by a member of the senior management for visiting a student who was struggling and who lived near the university on the basis that since this student was a distance learning student there should be no face to face meetings, that was what 'distance' meant. Everything should all be done by e-mail. MF was the most forthright in his criticisms of senior management - describing them as '*plonkers*'. On being asked why he continued to work (he was coming up to retirement age) he said

> *'My students. I still believe in what I do. In spite of what people say or don't say we still have a cutting edge course and we have managed to do good, despite (*management*) who don't know what we do and aren't interested'* (MF Academic University C)

Although MF said he told his wife '*he would pack it in*' because he was so frustrated and fed up with how things were being managed he retained his commitment to students and the values of DE '*to do good*'. He recognised that team working was breaking down as colleagues were resigning or being redeployed. But he expressed loyalty to fellow DE colleagues and to his new line manager who was '*doing her level best to keep these things going. But I think she has got a hopeless task in the present climate.*' (MF Academic University C). Another academic in the same university reflecting on the ongoing managerial changes taking place noted that the newly restructured management structure meant that

> '*Y*ou've got (non - academic) *departments where they've got no knowledge about the programmes, no knowledge about the modules, no knowledge about individual students, and the reality is whether university management, whatever that might mean, like it or not, if you want people to own programmes, own modules, own students then the students, I don't mean belong, but the connection is between the person, the student, and the module leader, the personal tutor. So one of the things that I find quite strange, and it's not just at University C, but I see quite heavily here is if you push on any of the issues we get told, "Well actually they're not your modules, they're not your students, they're university students", and sometimes I think "Well you can have the bloody students and the programme and the module, you look after them then", because the reality is the connection between people. It Is at the departmental level, at the programme level, at the module level and if you want people to engage in a healthy way with modules and material and students then you have to decentralise it. You have to trust people.*' (SC Academic University C)

SC was restating the core way distance education workers had set up distance education and worked together - decentralised and in teams. Like SC interviewees suggested that the team working which they found key to their positive feelings about work and which ensured academics and administrators addressed student problems as they arose, breaks down when the distance education administrators are taken out of the academic department and assigned to the central hub. Distance education was relationship working.

'There is a relationship between admin and academics and … I used to report directly to R (academic and Director of departmental distance education programmes) – I didn't report to any admin manager – and… what they wanted to change was that… line of responsibility because what they were saying to me was that I shouldn't be reporting to R – I shouldn't even be talking to him because he is an academic – and my argument with them was - yes but there is a relationship between admin and academics – he and – we both understand each other – where we're coming from and where the students are coming from – if I was to go and discuss this with a manager they wouldn't really understand it – they would still have to go back to the director – so it's – what they've done is – you know – by recruiting a lot of managers they've created this kind of hierarchy - which I don't think really helps… and I don't think information is getting filtered – filtered down as well… It's going to be a real shame because initially when staff move from the departments they will have that departmental knowledge – but when that staff members leave – or – even if they stay there a few years once all the changes have happened in the department they are not going to know anything – so how will they be able to advise students – because now – if an academic comes into the office to pick up… mail or something we can just have a quick word with them to say - oh you know we've had this enquiry so what do you think – or just discuss a student

case with them – they'll be able to advise us – and I think we lose all that. …You know the relationships we had with academics is not respected by the new management - even now when we talk to academics you do get questioned why you're talking to academics.' (ZA admin University C)

Every interviewee believed that one of the key reasons for the success of distance education in campus universities rested on the very special relationships that had been fostered within distance education departments - between academics and administrators which ZA refers to. This was for all interviewees more than a requirement of doing the job but a huge personal and emotional investment in collegial relationships with the shared aim of doing the very best by students. The introduction of sharp distinctions between academic and administrative work eroded these communities for, as ZA reported, such relationships were discouraged not only in the re-design of distance education structures - the hub - but by managers introducing a clear distinction between academic and administrative roles which distance education when it had grown in departments had avoided by developing a more democratic community of practice approach.

Some interviewees saw these changes as part of a bigger picture of higher education in which academic and educational decision making and leadership had now been displaced by a managerial culture.

*'They are not pedagogical or academic. These kinds of managerial people are entirely in charge of this university. It has been a radical change in three years. Those kinds of apparatchiks are absolutely in charge of the university and I would include our head of department in that. I am ranting a bit …but there is no one above me who I would go to for help, advice, or anything confidential, I have got nowhere to go.' (*AS Academic University A)

For AS this was a major, and disheartening change from an environment where in the past there had been a thriving distance education learning community to one where '*apparatchiks*' were in charge and had nothing to offer. PS, at the same university, saw these changes as the inevitable

> '*impacts of the prevalent neoliberal ideology. Which is now more about a cost and profit model. So the time and expense it takes to do good student support, good materials production, good delivery, there is a sense in which this is not seen as cost effective in terms of delivering something that is cheap.*' (PS admin University A)[40]

ZA expressed a similar view when she reported on a new departmental post of operations manager that had been created in her department at University C.

> '..(*his*) *background is not in the education sector – he came from… the banking sector – so he has got no understanding of the education sector and he wants to bring in his experience of the banking sector – so what he is saying to us is we are a business – we are not here for student experience – you know - we are a moneymaking thing – so that's why he wants – he wants us to work like we work in call centres – you know – like a call centre culture – and we've been arguing that that's not really going to work for our students – yes – you know - the university does need to make money for various – you know – overheads they've got – but there is still a difference…*' (Z A Admin University C)

The background of the operations manager was significant, for as ZA implies and most of the other interviewees agreed, there was now a clear business orientation - 'value for money' as opposed to 'service to students' - approach.

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[40] Shortly after the interviews at University A PS took a redundancy deal. In e mail correspondence after the interview he expressed his sadness over how things had developed.

Whilst this 'value for money' approach expressed itself in terms of 'increased efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity' the distance education workers argued the imposed system of business-oriented administrative tasks and assessments was just the opposite. It was, paradoxically ML argued, neither customer orientated or business efficient, but was excessively formalised and dysfunctional, creating new layers of bureaucracy.

> *'On our courses, xxx, students will always encounter situations where they are submitting late there is always that. And it went from a situation where we could allow students to have some degree of flexibility to a whole system of if a student submits late they have to get evidence from their manager; they have to go to a mitigating circumstances panel, which can take months, which impacts on their study. So instead of a quick e mail from a student to a tutor to say I am going to be a bit late and then they submit – one e mail – to a whole meeting structure, a regulation structure, with 5 or 6 people meeting to look through people's circumstances, approving it or not approving it. So the build-up of work is huge. I would say it has gone from 300 students wanting extensions being an hours work a year to being 50 hours a year, 100 hours a year. I mean if you quantify all the man hours involved in the mitigating circumstances panels alone it would be 100s of thousands of pounds from the university's point of view.'* (ML Admin University C)

For ML if the real costs were known and understood the claims for cost efficiency would collapse. ML went on to report that frequently, because of the length of time these administrative processes take, the decision of the panel was irrelevant because the student had dropped out or was so behind it was inevitable that they would drop out. Moreover not only were these processes disheartening for the distance education worker to engage in, they also left less and less time for meaningful engagement with students. The kind of work that brought satisfaction and fulfilment for the workers. A similar point was made by

a frustrated distance education academic in another department at the same university,

> *So we have become incredibly bureaucratic, you have to learn to live in it…The Mitigation Circumstances Panels that have to meet every so often – the work that has been generated simply by abolishing extensions is unbelievable. The bureaucracy that has developed as a result of these regulations, that keep having to be revised because they don't work, and we have to try and fit in.'* (MF Academic University C)

The mitigation processes as described by interviewees were introduced to streamline and regularise systems and processes at the university, interviewees explained. The problems for distance education workers were that they were designed for full-time campus students and were inappropriate for the circumstances of distance education students and made it increasingly difficult for the distance education workers to support their learners in the way they felt appropriate and had been able to do in the past by 'working around'. SC lamented that

> *'..the whole timetable of DL doesn't fit with universities, so all the procedures, all the bureaucracy, certainly here, is around the full time programme. The number of times that I have been involved in things that would require decisions coming into the summer break because that was quite an important period for us, there wouldn't be any committees after March - learning and teaching or whatever - they stopped at March. … So a lot of the committees structures are geared around full time, that makes a huge difference for the smooth running of a distance learning programme, so straight away it's whatever the rhetoric, it kind of doesn't work. … typically distance learning is a round the year thing and it doesn't follow that usual highs and lows, it's pretty continuous really.'* (SC Academic University C)

PP an administrator at University B commented that the new university systems, designed for the efficient management of undergraduate students, were not able to handle the requirements of distance education.

> *'There is very little overlap in the way they (*DE departments in the university*) did things, which was quite surprising, in other ways not. Because for us (*his DE department*) whilst the students numbers have increased quite a lot, there doesn't seem to be any movement from the university to support that because …for example, finance works very differently for us. Students (*full-time undergraduates*) who start in September can set up an instalment plan, which they can do very easily online. But we have students who start outside of September, certainly for other departments each month or, for us, four times a year, they can't do an online plan because the fees system won't let them.'* (PP Admin University B)

PP felt that the central administration, as with the finance system, would not and could not allow the academic departments to continue to maintain a student record system in parallel to the central university one. *'Because they demanded consistency'* across the university and - the BANNER student records management system could not and would never be able to recognise the way distance education students studied. He felt despite reporting to the central administration that for distance education these systems were not '*fit for purpose*' no notice was taken and he felt there was a time horizon on how long departments would be 'allowed' to manipulate the systems for distance education by keeping records alongside BANNER. He went on to comment on how the admissions process had been taken out of the department and the distance education team member who had worked on this had been physically moved to a faculty office. He was not sanguine that his small '*victory*' of having her come to the department for a proportion of her working week would last. This was significant because as a department they had wanted to encourage

non standard entry roots (as PN had noted) into the distance education programme and this would not so easily be achieved with the imposition of standard entry requirements administered by those who did not know or understand the programme. He reported that his job was '*challenging*' - he felt he was as a distance education worker going against the '*flow*' against '*the grain*' of wider system developments and he was '*banging (*his*) head against a wall*'.

> '*personally I have been fighting it for the past year.… I think that the current way that the university is trying to make things, of having things sit at that faculty level, is pulling the distance learning administration apart, and making things more difficult, not easier. It might be making things easier for the mainstream, face-to-face students: undergraduates and taught postgraduate face-to-face students. But certainly not for distance learning. It's making things that are already difficult even harder. And, I don't know about other members who work with distance learning students, but certainly for me, it seems to be hanging form a thread, you know, and they're making it even thinner*'. (PP Admin University B)

A further aspect of managerial changes in universities that has impacted on the distance education workers and that interviewees talked about is performance management through a range of quantitative metrics (e.g. student completion rates, student experience surveys, academic research output). These metrics impact on a university's position in the league tables and are seen as a valuable marketing tool by the university senior management. However they have created major problems for distance education workers' ability to 'work around' the system since the metrics gathered on students are designed with full time students in mind.

> *'They are looking for clean easy solutions, everybody fitting in a box. It is just for so called efficiency.'* (AS Academic University A)

As many of the interviewees reported, students in distance education take longer to complete - which does not look good in a department's, and ultimately, a university's completion returns. Student satisfaction surveys ask

> *'irrelevant questions which don't get answered by the DL students because they are on for instance the library building - it doesn't look good ....or submitting enrolment and completion data that makes any kind of sense is impossible for distance learning … So, actually getting what is apparently quite straightforward data, is almost impossible…in the way we are asked to report it'* (PN Academic University B)

One administrator at University C, commenting on the situation whereby distance education was being measured by inappropriate criteria and thereby looking poor in comparison to full time provision, said she had been told by her manager that the university did not want students that made the university look bad in the league tables because they took too long to complete their studies, or might even fail to complete. The situation was much the same at University A. Interviewees felt that the idea of helping students access knowledge and learn, so core to their beliefs of who they were and what they did, was of little interest in this environment. If a student was not going to straightforwardly succeed they were not wanted. Or as SG expressed it

> *They (*university*) see our efforts as misplaced. Not necessary. With them it is quantity not quality. They think students will just come to you…This is not the DL way.* (SG Admin University C)

Similarly the academics interviewed all felt that there has been a sharp move in their career life times towards valuing research over and above any other contribution they as academics could make. And this too was captured in

performance data. If researchers do not publish enough or in the right media, they can usually expect sanctions.

> '…the academic now is so narrowly defined as research active, and research active in a very particular way, i.e. a four star journal sort of way, that they're even less likely to become involved (in distance education) … and even teaching doesn't really count either … unless you are involved in research then what you're doing is actually of no value.' (SC Academic University C)

This perception of SC (an academic who had headed up a large distance education provision within a department) was widely held and has had an enormous impact on career progression and status for those involved in distance education. To involve yourself in distance education is 'career suicide' (PJ Academic University C). Reflecting on his career in distance education PJ noted

> 'I never did make it to Cambridge. In my old age I feel that I cheated myself of part of my academic career. In all humility I was one of the leading public sector economists until.. getting involved in distance education …. meant I could not have a research career. ..Sure I still wrote, advised government, and attended conferences but (recently) I attended a conference and met people I once knew and they said they thought I had died as I had disappeared without trace.   Well it is a choice. And it is something that S and M have hit up against. Unless you have got an enormous team, and University C has not got an enormous team, doing it on a shoe string as we continue to do you have these stark choices. I don't think it is possible to put into DL what is required to produce a quality programme and have a high profile as a researcher or a research career. You would have to be supper human to do it.'

(PJ Academic University C[41])

SF - an extremely well qualified and published young, but precariously employed academic on a temporary contract managing a distance education programme at University B made a similar point regarding the requirement to have an active research profile if he was to get an academic post in the present university climate. Which is what he wanted at the time of interview. He felt his experience in managing the distance education programme would not count for much in the current academic labour market when he sought his next post. He admitted that he was pleased to have the job and was very interested in the technology the programme had developed to deliver the programme. The technology might, he felt, help his employability. He added he couldn't allow himself to engage with the distance education students beyond what was absolutely necessary since this was not something he perceived as being valued in the appraisal process and would thus not help him get a permanent position let alone an academic post.

> *'From an academic perspective and being an active researcher it's just not going to enhance my career. Sorry. So effectively my current post gives me ten percent time in my contract, for personal development and research, which I am largely using up by taking a course, at the university, it's a teaching and research course, and it gives me higher education academy fellowship and so basically a certificate so I can teach. And you know it just doesn't leave me very much time for actually doing my own research so I spend a lot of time after work just to keep up my research profile, so that I can later apply for jobs and actually have a chance of getting anything.'* (SF, Admin, University B[42])

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[41] To be fair to PJ he did say he had thoroughly enjoyed his career and would not change anything. He is talking about the situation for academics now.

[42] I bumped into SF some months after the interview and he had given up any idea of an academic or even university post. He was very disillusioned.

SC also pointed out the inherent tension between being research active and the all year round demands of distance education:

> *'..it's not necessarily a problem; it creates a problem if you're trying to find space for research. So, and I suppose most academics who are working full time on full time programmes would say even if they can't research and do the writing during the term times, they can in summer. Of course that gets closed, squeezed out, if you're working DL.' (*SC Academic University C*)*

SC had enjoyed working in distance education, even the long hours, but he had become '*disillusioned*' because '*nothing was recognised or value*d':

> *'Because in the short term DL is long hours, in the medium term it's career and in the long term it's health. That's, from what I see, … part of the health issue is a psychological one because if you're putting in long hours, and those long hours, I mean you can't do what other people see as being 'academic' and therefore you're losing kudos.'*

> (SC Academic University C[43])

Macfarlane (2012) has described this process as the academic '*retreat from engagement*' with the university. For the distance education community of practice it means that the academics have had to withdraw from the community, or have taken a teaching only role, as happened to a number of interviewees at University B, and in effect happened at all three universities if academics remained in distance education because they are not deemed '*ref-able*'[44].

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[43] SC chose to give up distance education in order to take up a more traditional academic role

[44] Research Excellence Framework (REF). An interesting issue for further research might be how many of these teaching only contracts are held by women academics. On the other hand given the restructuring of higher education it might well be that many are men too on short term contracts.

> *'We kind of struggled with Ref …because of the competing pressures of distance learning'* (AS Academic University A)

One distance education administrator reported the situation as follows:

> *'When I first joined it was very much a team where there would be daily contact between everybody, there would be daily discussions about addressing issues …(but now)… instead of meeting people informally they have become monthly formal meetings where things are put on to paper to make things look good – a bit of a façade to say we are keeping quality, we are checking this, we are doing this, we are doing X Y and Z. But it is much less collegial now because we just don't have time. We don't have time to do that….(moreover)… the Director is much more focused on doing his own research, pushing forward his own research bids, taking study leave. And the new lecturer who is on a three year probation period is much more focused on doing the research to show that she has achieved all the research that is needed to get her a full time position. She won't be judged on student satisfaction on the course, she won't be judged on recruitment levels. There is no incentive for both of those academics to really engage in the DL experience.' (*ML Admin University of C)

For ML, as with many of the interviewees, disillusionment set in as the relationships with students and colleagues were eroded by the array of bureaucratic mechanisms and procedures introduced by university management[45]. AS expressed the changes she saw as follows:

> *'I think slowly we are becoming like a traditional academic department. I think the collegial bit is breaking down ….. from my perspective, and what I have been saying to everybody, the*

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[45] Shortly after the interviews ML resigned

*DL officers will just be pulled out of the department – either lose
their jobs or be centralised. So for me it would be much less of
an attractive department.'* (AS Academic University A)

A number of interviewees discussed the role of technology specifically in relationship to e-learning, and the impact this was having on distance education and themselves as distance education workers. Interviewees at universities A and C reported the increasing pressure from senior management to deliver all teaching on line and to dispense with paper based course materials. None of the workers interviewed said they were opposed to using learning technologies per se, and in all the distance education provision technology had been pioneered and embraced where it helped improve the service to students - in particular in communicating with students both individually e.g. using Skype or collectively using various forms of asynchronous conferencing technologies. Many reported that when they resisted e.g. putting their course fully on line because their ongoing research and feedback processes among their students showed that this was not what was wanted or could be easily accessed (paper was seen as more portable) or because they felt what was being created was pedagogically unsound, they were labelled 'conservative', 'fearful', 'disruptive' 'refusenicks', 'against change'.

*'But they (senior management) do not believe it and they literally
think we are lying. They have not said it in so many words but
they think we are misguided. They think "that can't be right, on
line is the way, this is what people will like"'.* (AS Academic
University A)

Senior management, it was said, saw e-learning as '*self-evidently a good thing*' with little understanding of what they were promoting. At University C a number of distance education academics talked about the pressure from a specialist e-learning department, supported by senior management, to pilot an ever expanding range of e-learning applications and tools[46]. All interviewees felt

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[46] This was at a time when short term grants were being made to encourage universities to take up technology in teaching.

there was no recognition that distance education workers had gained years of experience about what might work and what might not. Or to accept their professional judgement when they suggested a particular technology added nothing or very little, was unreliable and untested, could not be sustained - after the funded pilot - and so forth. Some interviewees were angry that their knowledge counted for nothing, others expressed a resigned stoicism at this situation. AS summarised this rush to technology as follows

> *'People are living in a Star Trek world where they think there will be all this stuff on line and it will be all interactive and fantastic. But actually when you see what they do it is really boring, clunky – click here to see the answer – and there will be some inane description of 'you might have thought about these points'. And it is hardly an improvement on a book and yet they keep going on, and in reality it is a dumbing down of intellectual scholarship because everything has to be bite sized, in a chunk, and there is no room for complex inquiry. It is fine for things like maths I suppose. So it is a very unscholarly approach to learning. Because a lot of the people who are driving it are not academics. Although some academics are like that as well. People are caught in the glare of technology in an uncritical way.'*
> (AS Academic University A)

For AS, as for other interviewees, the technology has become an end it itself rather than what the distance education workers were concerned about - the applicability of a given technology to support student learning. Moreover she argued it was impeding access for disadvantaged learners for if students didn't have access to the technologically delivered distance education they could not study - the raison d'être for distance education. In addition she saw technology driven distance education as invariably pedagogically unsound when undertaken by those who did not start their programme design from an understanding of who the students were - the starting point for distance

education programme design. She expressed the view that there was a serious lack of understanding about distance education that the e-learning trope reflected

> *'They are conflating it* (distance education) *with e learning. They don't make a distinction between the two. E-learning is just a tool as far as I am concerned. DL is a pedagogical framework but I don't think they are making that distinction.'* (AS Academic University A)

Another interviewee, noting this wider lack of understanding among senior management of the cost structures of distance education, and what the use of technologies might do to costs[47], noted,

> *'…I think what the irony is, is that the more you use technology the more labour intensive it becomes. And they don't get that at the top at all. The idea that you can find a technology ….. distance learning students don't want to mimic online what is done offline by just simply uploading a video. They want interaction and interaction is labour intensive.'* (Academic SC University C)

The value of interactivity (synchronous and asynchronous) for distance education teaching and learning was not understood by senior management who drove technological change regardless of its contribution, interviewees said. And as noted interviewees expressed both sadness and anger at the way their distance education expertise in the field was ignored. The distance education community of practice which had defined itself by its ongoing study and improvement of its practice felt aghast and overwhelmed by the uncritical promotion of technologies in learning.

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[47] The is well understood in the distance education literature on costs. Not an area of expertise of campus universities.

'Considering this is a university there is very little analysis of the impact of technology, ideas about technological determinism, what technology does, how it is influenced by society and culture, all of those things they don't think about at all. They are literally interested in promoting it as a product. That is what you feel. Their approaches to e learning are just about selling a product which I just don't think is appropriate in a university. …… we do have a base line that is you have to have a computer with internet access to do this course – that makes sense. But if it is getting to the point that it is so mediated by technology that if you don't have an e reader, and you don't have 24/7 access and the most latest access, you can't do the course. It just does not make any sense.' (AS Academic University A)

AS felt departments were being pressurised to adopt certain technologies because universities were trying to '*package*' distance education and make it a profitable commodity.

RD reflected on this technological imperative ruefully saying:

I am more philosophical about it now. I feel if you want to let DL collapse or try out new things that won't work…I can't stop them. Let them get on with it and we will see. (RD Academic University C)

He reported a conversation he had had some years before with an incoming professor who headed up a unit on e-learning who was insistent that all things distance education should be on line

'I told her that our students don't want this, they don't have the connectivity, and when they go on line it is for very specific things, and in any case they live a peripatetic existence, this is

true of all our DL e.g. they are up a mountain in Afghanistan or wherever. The response was there are students who are. Go to them. And I said point them to me I am not aware of them. Trust me she said. Well maybe they can next week, next year. And there is always that argument - it is where things are going. And I am saying but we know where the business is now. We know what the demand is; we know what our students want. And we can deliver it. It is not very flashy - it is print. Yes they want on-line but it is for support and advice and then they want it quick. But the learning and reading that is what we do. Delivering it is our job.' (RD Academic University C)

Interestingly at University B, the one Russell Group University, neither of the two distance learning departments during the interview period reported any pressure from the wider university about using learning technologies or how they designed and delivered their programmes. Both programmes were offered on line. However MK reported that there was an awareness at the university that the whole university was '*behind*' on new technologies. And '*so there is a bit of an emphasis on all things digital and on line'*. She alone among interviewees reported that emphasising the online aspect of their distance education programme had had some impact within the wider university when they showed what they were doing in respect of learning technologies and linked it to

'..campus based teaching in the form of blended learning techniques. Then it is valuable to the university as a whole… even if distance became a bigger part of the taught post graduate programmes they would still not be significant in terms of the university…..The distance aspect is less interesting to the university but the lessons for developing blended learning on campus they are very interested in. So I have found if I talk about that it gets very positively received.' (MK Academic University B)

MK reported that the only university-wide committee that distance education is represented on is that with an oversight of digital and blended learning. She went on to note that this

> '*is the first real recognition of the distance programmes as a cohort in the university*'… (And strategically, whilst the programme was on-line distance), '*in the university we tend to refer to it as an on line programme!*' (MK Academic University B)

At University B autonomy was retained in how their programmes were designed and delivered but as with the other universities they were impacted by other university wide developments e.g. the new student record systems and the changing role of what was expected from academics. Indeed the academic heading up the programme that itself was about sophisticated technology favoured quite traditional content delivery with more interactive feedback systems. Indeed he talked about some of the technological '*enhancements that I'd like to do*' but recognised the impact such changes might have on the wider team for little or no benefit:

> '*But if I do that and one or two others of the keener people were to do that, actually the disparity would be even greater. It's not a reason not to enhance your teaching materials but there is an element of, well actually, I don't need to do it, it's going to be terribly time-consuming for me to do all that. And it is almost an implied pressure on everybody else. I've done this fantastic embedded resource like this and it's sort of, you know, do we all have to do that? Well no, you don't but…So there is a different degree of buy-in and energy by different staff.*' (PN Academic University B)

PN also recognised that managing the distance education provision required understanding and valuing the team with all the different skills and knowledge different members brought:

> '..*so you've got people who are slightly dinosaurs* (teaching methods) *themselves, but on the other hand they are incredibly busy in other aspects, and make contributions in other important ways, to the DL courses.'*
> (PN Academic University B)

This approach to 'valuing the team' was not universal at University B. And PN was only referencing the academics who worked in the distance education team in the quotation above. Although he was acutely aware of the changes taking place outside of this team but which were beyond his control. During the period of the research many of the interviewees reported stress as they tried to make distance education work in the changing environment. SC, as reported above, suggests that long hours without recognition leads to '*health issues*'. It was clear that a number of interviewees felt, and a number reported outside of the interview feeling 'stressed' and 'harassed' (See chapter 4). PP talked on record about the increasing personal cost of making distance education students fit the system and retaining the student focus distance education workers had proudly espoused:

> *'I sort of cracked, a while back by doing too much. Because the students are spread out across the world, it means that if an email comes in after working hours, if you don't respond to it that day, that evening, if you work into the next day you're delaying things by maybe another two days, three days. Because they don't get it for another day at least. I used to answer emails on the computer at home. On the i-pad or on my phone. Which wasn't healthy for work/life balance. And I was on holiday, at Christmas, in the States, and I was looking at emails, trying to get students registered, which wasn't healthy. But you know if*

you have …. I guess what it emphasises … if the people working in distance learning are committed to helping the students which for the most part I'm sure they are…you will do this, whatever it takes,…. if you don't really care about it you're going to get out of teaching in distance learning very quickly, or helping out administratively. For some people I'm sure it's become just a job, which they'll do what they need to do…Nine-to-five.' (PP Admin University B)

PP admitted that he had ceased working in the fast and responsive way he had in earlier days - overwhelmed by the rising student numbers and the inherent difficulties of working within the inflexibility of the administrative systems to deal with distance education students. He expressed his personal despondency over how his attitude to his work had changed, no longer '*going the extra mile*'.

Distance education work was changing at all the universities. The university-wide changes to academic and administrative roles were breaking up the communities of practice and the shared distance education habitus could not survive these changes.

RD sadly observed

'The time for the way DL worked has gone, it has passed. It was effective it recruited students some great people who were brilliant to work with for everyone at all levels – admin, associate tutors, us – doing critical things…in different parts of the world, …And I am not sure whether the university has any idea about what has to be done and whether creating central systems will achieve this. Even whether there is enough interest in departments now to do it. And I as I say I am now more philosophical about it now.' (RD Academic University C)

The views RD expresses most of the interviewees at University A and C would endorse. PS commenting   on the situation at University A maintained that distance education had fallen foul of the financial drivers imposed by university management which

> *'..are increasingly important as far as senior management are concerned. So there are two separate issues: one is about having good pedagogical principles that we would support - flexible, open -and are foundations for good distance learning. But whether the institution understands these and put them into practice is one thing. And then we have the downward financial pressures from senior management who are trying to dig their way out of a rather difficult situation that the institution is in at the moment, and the financial dynamics of having open, but slow delivery, is not something that I think that they are very interested in even though there may be very good pedagogical reasons for doing it that way. You have got a very strong financial barrier that is coming from management.' (*PS Admin University A)

Summary

The research reported in this chapter suggests that the development of distance education in UK campus universities was envisioned, led and sustained by committed teams working collectively and non hierarchically. This was described as a community practice. These teams also shared what is termed a distance education habitus (see chapter 7). This way of working was very different to the way the mainstream university worked. And whilst distance education did not easily fit into the campus university structures, as Durham and See (2014) and Duranton and Mason (2012) describe (see chapter 3) the distance education workers could make it work. They could 'work around' the university systems and ensure that their departmental distance education flourished. This was a cottage industry operating alongside the mainstream provision without the systems and structures the foundational theorists of

distance education had presumed necessary for success. Nor were these large scale undertakings. All of these distance education initiatives developed at a time of what might be described as a more hands off university management (approximately late 1980s to early 2000s), where departments could be entrepreneurial and could develop distance education provision that was student focused and supportive. And which critically was meaningful and empowering for the distance education workers. However it was reported that gradually things were changing as local departmental management and administrative tasks were centralised to non academic units, new university wide technology systems like BANNER were adopted, and roles - particularly academic roles - began to change.

The next chapter seeks to understand how distance education came to be and how it was sustained in campus universities, and how it is now under threat, utilising the wider conceptual and theoretical framework that had began to emerge during the data gathering process - community of practice, habitus and managerialism.

Chapter 7 Making Sense of the Data. Understanding How Distance Education Emerged and was Sustained in Campus Based Universities in the UK.

This thesis has been concerned with seeking an understanding of how distance education came to be, and indeed thrive, in campus universities when the distance education literature suggested that either this would not happen or, alternatively, would happen by becoming mainstreamed within campus provision. This chapter aims to underpin the emerging interpretive explanation of the research data reported in the previous chapter by drawing upon wider sociological theory. The first section of the chapter summarises the research journey - the inductive and iterative approach. The next two sections harness the insights of community of practice and habitus to develop an understanding of how it was possible for distance education to develop and thrive in campus universities. Chapter 8 reflects on the changed working environment within universities that appear to be destroying the distance education community of practice and habitus that created bottom up student focused distance education.

The research journey

As the interviewing and reflection process proceeded in what has been termed stage one of the research it became very clear that the conventional approaches to understanding the development and continuation of distance education in campus universities were inadequate if not inappropriate. The focus of inquiry needed to turn to the distance education workers themselves and not simply the structures, systems and/or technologies within which distance education arguably could or could not happen. That is to say the agency of distance education workers had to be acknowledged and by adopting a more ethnomethodological approach it was possible to access and hear their stories. Whilst such an approach can fall into the trap of seeing the individual subject isolated from others (Hughes 2008 p.173), what was apparent, and was expressed throughout the interviews, was the interdependence and collegial

nature of distance education work. In the normal 'doing' of their distance education work this interdependence did not need to be articulated. It was taken for granted and core to how interviewees worked. It was everyone's common experience shaping and being shaped by what in Eliasian terms might be described as a distance education figuration. The interviewing process enabled interviewees to eloquently describe this.

Seeking and generating an understanding of the significance and commonalities of the distance education workers' narratives inevitably led to a dynamic interchange, or symbiosis, between data collection and theoretical analysis of the data as discussed earlier.   Thus the prominence early interviewees gave to the way they worked - (in particular team work and the difference between them and 'others' in the university, and the ideas and commitment they expressed about their work) - not only steered a search for and an examination of those concepts and theories that talked to these kinds of accounts, but also guided a more iterative process of interviewing, reflection, and theorising with each successive interview. In this way

> *'the general conceptual models take form gradually and inextricably in conjunction with   - indeed as an integral component of - substantive investigations' (Dunning and Hughes 2013 p.190).*

The auto-ethnographic reflections plus contemplation on the   stories interviewees told about their work processes, led to a recollection of the importance of communities of practice experienced by the researcher in previous posts. This was particularly so with respect to those roles relating to tutors and staff development at the UKOU[48] . A critical aspect of the UKOU's success rested on its community of excellent part time tutors (Lentell 1994, 2003) and it was this that a number of the eulogies, referred to earlier (chapter

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[48] It was not until my involvement at Royal Roads University in Canada as a board member of one of their distributed learning programmes that I was introduced to this concept to describe my work (circa 2002) at the UKOU. An interesting demonstration of Sotto's (1994) observation that practitioners may not know or have the conceptual tools to describe their (good) practice and frequently can only describe what they do. The role of theory (of teaching in this instance) is to abstract from this practice generalisable good practice.

4), made reference to. The total engagement of working collegially for something that was seen by all as valuable and which also cultivated meaningful, and in many cases, life long friendships.

Thus the idea grew from the research process itself that the concept of communities of practice might deliver considerable insight into the way distance education worked in campus based universities, and by identifying the community of practice it became possible to recognise the distance education habitus of those who set up and sustained distance education.

Communities of Practice

The concept of a community of practice, originally developed by Lave and Wenger (Wenger 1998) as an educational theory, has now been utilised in many contexts where people work and learn together. Lave and Wenger start with the assumption that engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we get to know what we know and by which we become who we are. Thus the principal focus of analysis is neither the individual nor social institutions, but the informal communities of practice that people form as they pursue shared enterprises over time. The theory explores the intersection of issues of community, social practice, meaning, and identity providing a lens for thinking about learning as a process of social participation.

Communities of practice are made up of groups of people who share a common interest, concern and or passion and collaborate over time sharing their ideas and practices. As a result, they interact regularly and learn together (perhaps unintentionally) and in the process they innovate and do things better. For a community of practice to develop Lave and Wenger argued that there needed to be:

> a) *A domain of interest and a commitment to this.*
> b) *A community - those who undertake and interact and engage with the domain of practice by helping each other and sharing*

information. In doing this they build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

c) *Practitioners with a shared repertoire of resources – stories, tools, ways of handling issues and problems which develops and grows over time. Through practice – collective problem solving, requesting and sharing information and applying the experience of others, adapting and reusing the tools and materials of others, discussion, visiting other practitioners, coordinating, mapping knowledge and working to fill gaps – the community develops.*

(Lave and Wenger 1991)

Distance education is the 'domain of interest' of all the interviewees. However it proved impossible to give an a priori, or a context independent, definition of distance education workers and what categories of staff were inside the distance education community of practice since this depended on how distance education worked and is organised within any particular department. So in University A e.g. the course designers were central but at University B no reference was made to them at all as an independent category of staff. University C had overseas agents - Universities A and B did not. No department, even within the same university, did things in exactly the same way. Fuller notes this is a '*container notion*' where

'the researcher is always left with making decisions about what is inside or outside the container as well as how large it should be' (Fuller 2007:23).

Technically this is correct, but since I was a distance educator I could be regarded as knowledgable to make decisions about who was inside and who was outside. However as it turned out what decisions were made rested on availability for interview. Thus off campus personnel e.g. overseas agents and part time tutors, would be difficult to interview and were not available. And all those who put themselves forward in the selected distance education departments for interview were interviewed - i.e. they opted themselves in. (As

did distance education workers from other departments - but it would have got out of hand to interview everyone who expressed interest.) Chapter 4 covers the decisions taken about interviews. It is important to stress that those interviewed defined themselves 'in' the distance education community and their colleagues considered they were too. This was true however 'new' or relatively 'inexperienced' interviewees were.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued, following their observations of apprentices, that learning is a situated, social process dependent on, and developed through, interactions between the apprentice and 'the master' as well as others in their apprenticeship community. Successful apprentices were able to move from the edge (or periphery) of the community to full participation in its social and cultural practices. This in turn resulted in apprentices forming an identity with the community. In due course the novices would themselves become old-timers with their own apprentices, and this ongoing process, they argued, continuously rejuvenated the community of practice.

Whilst the distance education context is not a formal apprenticeship arrangement   new distance education workers learn alongside more experienced workers in much the same way. They interact with more experienced workers and participate fully in the work processes of the distance education community of practice in their department, thereby forming their identity as distance education workers. Learning to become a distance education worker is not merely the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills to enable distance education tasks to be carried out, rather it is a process of social participation in which the newcomer learns and internalises the appropriate workplace ethos that guides their work behaviour e.g. student centredness. The term 'legitimate peripheral participation' provides a way to understand the relationship between newcomers and the more experienced distance education workers. The newcomers participated in the community but as they gained experience they became more confident and independent to act without guidance whilst being firmly within the community. Or as Goodwin (2007) describes it for the young workers of his study, legitimate peripheral

participation captures the process of 'transitioning' to adulthood, or for this study, transitioning into the appropriate behaviour of the distance education worker. Thus RO (admin University B) and less than two years into her job, said that whilst she had realised on appointment that distance learning students were different to campus students the implications of this, and what this meant for both the students - their different needs and feelings - and her as an administrator was learned on the job and by sharing a room with the manager of the distance education programmes. Observing, hearing and talking to the manager, and doing the job.

New distance education workers were indeed learning on the job The particular structure of distance education within all nine departments at the three campus universities - team work and empowerment - encouraged members to be actively engaged and participating whilst at the same time developing knowledge and competence. As MT said

> *'We do everything together academic and administrative.' (*MT
> Admin University A)

> *Or SH*

> *'We are a team. All academics are staff in our department. We*
> *work closely together. We have regular meetings every month to*
> *discuss issues, you know, ….. I like this way of working. It is a*
> *good feeling.' (*SH Admin University C)

If this was not a way of working that newcomers liked they left. As JM (Academic University C) remarked this was very rare. Most appreciated the sense of being encouraged to suggest and implement new ways of doing things. Distance education workers felt valued by their colleagues.

This does not preclude someone being a member of more than one community of practice. Thus in universities distance education academics might be

involved in multiple communities of practice e.g. those based around their discipline within their departments, or across their institutions, and/or professional bodies and practitioner organisations (James 2007). It does however suggest that were the demands of the different communities to be in tension, e.g. research vs. supporting students, this could be detrimental to participation in one or other community of practice. And Macfarlane (2012) has observed that changing demands on academics has led them to focus on research and no longer participate in the wider university community. As indeed PJ (academic University C) reported when reflecting on academic involvement in distance education in his university.

There was also a large outer group to the distance education community of practice in most departments. That is those who were not core and may not have any commitment to it. These included those who were engaged in related and similar work and who only involved themselves with distance education in so far as it was a requirement of their employment that they undertake certain functions. Thus for example the distance education community of practice did not include those campus based academics who were tasked to mark distance education students' assignments and provide feedback to the distance education team and, so it was reported, may well regard distance education as onerous, an interference with their more primary and pressing concerns – e.g. research. Indeed SC (University C academic) described, as referred to in Chapter 6, the 'othering' of distance education within his department and where the distance education students were deemed to be '*dumbing down*' the department. This had the effect of further reinforcing the community of practice by encouraging those within it to define themselves as separate and different to other colleagues at the university. A situation Hastings reported with teachers (2008) involved in the Sure Start programme in Leicester. And many interviewees talked about this phenomenon of being different and separate to others. '*We are different*', '*we do things differently*' was a common response from interviewees in all the departments in all three universities.

The outer group also includes the more positively regarded '*go to*' people within e.g. central services (admissions, registry, etc.). This group may have a high regard for the distance education community and what they were seeking to achieve but they were not distance education workers. They were not core members of the distance education community. They did have knowledge of university matters necessary to operate distance education. Indeed the distance education workers became adept at identifying the sympathetic staff in those departments and then cultivating and befriending them. HD (University B admin) reflected that one of the members of her distance education community of practice was a 'walking *directory of names*' of who to go to in the administration when problems arose and she said this was indispensable knowledge for their team. Creating a risk that she was well aware of if he should '*fall under the proverbial bus*'. MK (University B academic), at the same university, said that her list of names was probably the key information she was passing on to the person who would be covering for her when she went on maternity leave, since not everyone in central services were sympathetic and prepared to do the extra work required to help ease the path of distance education students caught up in '*administrative knots*'. The periphery in the research sample also included those people who were not employed full time at the universities but may play very significant roles in the distance education provision. They were invariably well thought of and were consulted frequently. Typically this group included partners (e.g. agents, logistics personnel, educational technologists, instructional designers[49] etc.) and part time tutors. For the distance education workers these positive relationships were, as with their relationships with their (core) community of practice, based on mutual trust and respect as PJ (University C admin) reported.

Recognising the significance of the concept of a community of practice during the research redefined the field of enquiry and enabled a focus on distance education workers in campus based universities, beyond formal structures and institutional processes - (discipline, faculty, committee, policies, etc.) - which

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[49] Who exactly was in this group depended on how distance education was organised. This was particularly true of instructional designers who might be, certainly at the creation and early years of a course, key members of the community of practice.

typifies distance education theorising. And, it is argued, enabled a deeper analysis of participation in social practice - the distance education work and work relationships - thereby aiding an understanding of the significance of this community in sustaining distance education in campus universities. These workers have largely been unrecognised in the distance education literature. And as Hughes, Jewson and Unwin describe the concept of community of practice

> *'provided a lens that rendered visible what had previously been invisible, ignored or neglected'.* (Hughes, Jewson and Unwin p. 16)

Some interviewees considered that it was inevitable that a community of practice would be created among distance education workers because they worked together across roles and helped each other, doing

> *'everything together (both) academic and administrative' (*MT admin University A).

Newcomers learned the social and cultural practices of '*doing everything together*' through legitimate peripheral participation in the distance education community of practice as described above. This reinforced team working. Indeed the greater complexity of distance education delivery, rightly identified by the early theorists of distance education (See chapter 3), and referred to by interviewees necessitated collaboration and sharing in order to get work done and to succeed. Distance education in all the universities existed within academic departments where distance education was of little or no interest to the majority of the department - neither academic nor administrative staff. For those involved with distance education interacting with each other through mutual engagement in the joint enterprise (distance education) built up relationships which created a coherent community of deeply committed workers to their shared distance education endeavour within their departments. Interviewees felt empowered by this community and believed they as individual

workers fulfilled a significant role. Their connections with each other were both meaningful and supportive, and were built on collegial recognition of the strengths and contributions each brought to their community. One interviewee described these attachments as making her '*go into work with a spring in her step*' (JJ). Dunning and Hughes have pointed out, such

> '*social relations form an often unrecognised, frequently misunderstood, and variably important part of everything humans are and do*' (Dunning and Hughes 2013:1).

And this was palpably the case for the distance education workers interviewed - trust, friendship and collegiality enabled all to feel they worked together to do a good job. And this had come about because newcomers had had what might be termed an (unrecognised but informal) apprenticeship (traineeship) - of legitimate peripheral participation - in which they learned distance education through interacting and participating within the community. In other words the distance education community was one of active social participation and meaningfulness.

Active participation created and reinforced both the norms of behaviour and the coherence of the group. Thus all the distance education departments had regular meetings where all the distance education staff attended. These were often, especially when compared to the typical and more formal wider university meetings, very informal and un-minuted. Frequently food was shared and in some instances food was ordered in. Everything was open and however 'junior' the staff member was they could present problems and ideas. In this way staff were socialised into the ways of doing distance education and became confident, and proud, of what they did. Junior staff also gained confidence, and became empowered to raise issues and make suggestions whenever they felt it necessary to do so, and to act independently of codified rules and predetermined scripts when talking with students. Everyone interviewed believed that they were there to serve 'their' students in all that they did. When they felt unsure about new policies from the university their internalised distance

education ethos was to consider the impact of these changes on their students. The distance education workers did not consider they were in post to merely implement university rules and regulations where these were perceived to harm their students and undermined their purpose in providing distance education. There was for all those interviewed an expectation that distance education workers had a student focus which put the students first in all that they did. As the research revealed many interviewees had to struggle with the administration on behalf of their distance education students, who being adults and living complicated and difficult lives and at a distance to the university, frequently butted up against the university rules e.g. on assignment submission times. Or as PN put it

> *'we are fighting the system because the system probably can't get it right for distance learning.' (PN academic University B)*

The university regulations lacking flexibility and designed for on-campus students frequently made studying impossible for distance education students. Many of the regulations and processes of the university were risible in the context of distance education. And all the distance education interviewees told stories about the inappropriate decisions and actions of the central university administration regarding distance education students, which continued year on year despite the distance education workers attempts to correct this. Consequently the distance education workers devised strategies to 'work around' to prevent or rectify the university's detrimental actions from negatively impacting on distance education students. Or as SW said

> *'.. we are manipulating the regulations to fit DL students all the time.' (SW Admin University C)*

These accounts of struggle became a shared repertoire of stories that amplified the image of the distance education workers set apart from the mainstream. A common theme underlying the accounts saw the university as readily taking fee income from distance education students but lacking the understanding,

empathy and even intention to ensure the flexibility distance education students required in order to study successfully and have a good experience. Despite the fact that this 'flexibility' is what one university promoted in its marketing of distance education. This set the distance education workers apart from, and frequently in conflict with, the mainstream campus. The distance education community of practice was not institutionalised in the sense that they did not uncritically defend the university when they perceived it had made errors. And a number of interviewees explicitly commentated that their student focus was not viewed positively by the wider management of the university - *'too involved with students', 'too good a service provided for students', 'gold plated service', 'too individualised'* - were descriptors some interviewees reported university management had used to describe their approach to students which then strengthened their view of themselves as different.

The distance education community gave its members the support to 'work around' university rules and to advocate for their students, which often led to confrontations with the wider university administration. This was empowering for (officially) junior staff. And they gained the confidence to do this working within a community of practice with non hierarchical structures. Indeed one story told off the record by a number of interviewees at University C concerned a 'junior' and non academic distance education worker challenging a member of the senior management team in a large public meeting about distance education student numbers. This was unheard of and apparently turned quite nasty. This distance education worker felt empowered to do so having full knowledge of the distance education in her department at her command which the senior member of management had not. For, as a number of the academics reported, not only did the departmental distance education administrators know the total student numbers and what stage they were at in their studies, (they had to because they were in effect running a small business), they frequently knew the students very well - ('e*veryone calls me the queen of the names*') - and were thus able to contribute knowledgeably about the progress of students, (what aspects of the course(s) they found difficult for example, or their personal circumstances that might impact on their studies). This knowledge had the benefit of ensuring that

actual or possible academic and/or administrative problems could be forestalled or resolved quickly. All interviewees considered that this close working relationship between academics and administrators was a key and unique factor in their effectiveness.

All had valuable knowledge and experience to share. So whilst for example the creation of study materials might appear as a straightforward academic task there was inevitably collective discussion - integrating study skills, how and which technology may or may not solve a problem, an understanding of student profiles, workload and so forth meant all had input. This interdependency continued once a course was offered. And as a number of the interviewees noted the role of the administrator in their distance education provision was radically different to those administrators on campus. They were '*intimately*' and '*frequently*' engaged with the students and course delivery as RD put it. In this way traditional university hierarchies, widespread within the wider university, disintegrated within the community and strengthened more egalitarian ways of working. This kind of mutual engagement (talking and sharing as equals), and mutual dependency (each individual critical to the whole), strengthened and developed the community of practice and made it easier for members to identify as distance education workers.

The concept of community of practice, although now widely applied in many contexts, was originally an educational concept. For Wenger, learning involved active social participation, (1998) not as a supplement to the learning process but the very means of learning itself. Thus learning can take place anywhere and is not simply something that happens or is done to 'empty vessels' within formal educational institutions. As Fuller (2007) notes learning is no longer defined in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, more fundamentally it is defined as participation. Focusing on situated learning, communities of practice theory draws attention to social learning and describes how newcomers become experienced members and eventually old timers of a community of practice. The workers interviewed did not come to their posts knowing all about distance education and most did not belong to, let alone know about, the

professional bodies for distance educators. Rather they reported learning on the job by talking to colleagues. Working out what needed to be done whilst doing it, and then reflecting upon what they had done in order to improve. As HD described they did with their departmental distance education data base or ML with the involvement of alumni. This way of working was embedded in the work process, and as all were involved enabled everyone to feel empowered to improve and innovate. In some distance education departments individuals recognised that they could assist and learn from other departments and therefore set up informal university wide distance education groups and forums to share and discuss matters relating to distance education.

Learning was also very important and assisted in the integration of newcomers helping them to become more confident and engaged. As Fuller and Unwin (2004) have pointed out learning in a community of practice is not a linear process with newer members learning from older members. Rather in the workplace this is a dynamic relationship of learning where the younger may well become the teachers of the older employees within the workplace community. This was frequently the case in the distance education community where for instance young entrants taught older workers not only about up and coming learning technologies but also helped them feel more confident in the usage of technology generally. On the other hand the more experienced members temper impractical and sometimes inappropriate enthusiasms for new technology applications in the context of distance education requirements[50].

What is being argued is that practitioner participation helps socialise and enculturate and then deepen involvement of new members into the sociocultural practices of the distance education community of practice. Their identity as distance education workers emerges out of their participation, in that they share common understandings and concerns about what it means to them as individuals. Thus SW talking about her job said

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[50] At one university during the research period this balance became unbalanced with pressure being put on the distance education departments to adopt what were seen by the departments as unsustainable and inappropriate technology applications. At two universities interviewees reported that distance educators were frequently denounced as 'dinosaurs' because they didn't do everything on line. This also reinforced the view of the departments that the wider university had no understanding of how distance education worked.

²I love my job. People ask me what I do, and I say, and then they say "ain't it boring" and I say no because it is varied and you do different things every day, sometimes it is the same but then you get different situations and you have to talk to different students – could be about finances or progression – so you talk to academics and others. Obviously I have got line mangers – so you do talk to them if I have got any issues or things I am concerned about. Yeh, you can do things the same   but it is the outcome that can be different. So that is what I like – the variety of the job….I have to make sure that I schedule my holidays around e.g. when there are assignments due in. I can't, wouldn't, just take leave. I know when the busiest times are. I have control and I can see when an assignment is coming up and when it will be busy. With the assignments going on to Blackboard they still have to go out for marking, I know the schedule and I know that time will be busy and to avoid it. … The e mails consist of extension requests, or if they are struggling sometimes I can just talk to them but sometimes it is an academic query and I have to forward it to the tutor. But I still have to keep track of it, keep e mails and notes on their academic record. Keep it up to date. A lot of keeping the records up to date, progression of the students and keeping them up to date with things and me knowing what is coming up. Contacting them regularly to check how they are going on, um if they have got any problems a lot of them would leave it till late if they want an extension – like say there is an assignment due on the 23rd of April they would e mail 2 days before wanting an extension but in the regulations they have got to give us 2 weeks' notice. They have got to keep on top of things. It is quite a fast paced module. 10 weeks. So turnaround of assignments is quick. It matters. So they need to be reminded of this. So it is supporting them – knowing what the deadlines are, have to stick to these

as we do apply penalties if they don't stick to the dates, so they are going to lose marks if they are late. If they are struggling with assignment writing there is like support on the University web site. We always try to steer them to that and of course there is their academic tutor. As long as they do that they will be OK. But we have got to keep them ahead, pushing them along a bit.
(SW admin University C)

In summary the theory of communities of practice identifies and describes a group defined by a shared interest and how the group is co-constructed by its members and the significance the communities have for the identity of its members. Indeed the existence of the distance education community of practice may explain the 'high performance' outcomes, claimed by some interviewees. And Ashton and Sung (2002) argue that members of communities of practice in the work place are indeed highly motivated to work beyond what might be expected of them. On the other hand as Unwin and Fuller (2004) note communities of practice are not an inevitable consequence of people working together, even though some of the interviewees suggested their community might be a direct outcome of the nature and requirements of distance education. Rather Unwin and Fuller suggest the environment created by management is important and communities of practice are more likely to occur in what they term 'expansive' environments rather than 'restrictive' ones. A number of interviewees at University C who had set up distance education talked about the encouragement they received from the university secretary, and others talked of the need to get the support of Heads of Department. This might suggest that wider management, or those with power within the university, have a more significant role than is apparent from a narrow focus on the distance education community of practice. This is an important issue which will be returned to in chapter 8 which explores the impact of   managerialism on distance education.

Identifying the distance education community of practice - which does not exist in a tangible form in the way distance education policies and structures do -

may explain the absence from conventional analyses of the distance education workers in other than passive ways - workers needing to be trained - rather than the proactive and committed creators, developers and maintainers of distance education. Recognising the community of practice enables a re-examination of distance education in campus universities in the UK that focuses on the workers. However whilst it offers a cogent account about the maintenance of distance education in campus universities it does not offer an account of how distance education came about in the first place in environments that are primarily for campus based learning and therefore not conducive to such provision. Nor does the concept of community of practice give sufficient attention to the wider university environment within which distance education is presented. The distance education examined came about, bottom up, in a very permissive environment of light touch management. This is not the case today. A fuller comprehension of the rise of distance education in campus based universities may be realised by focusing on the ideas, attitudes and values of the workers themselves which may also proffer an understanding of the powerlessness and marginalisation distance education workers expressed with the advent of managerialism in the university.

The Distance Education Habitus

The concept of communities of practice applied to the community of distance education workers provides a conceptual tool to both identify and understand how these workers 'do' their work - collectively and collegially - in their workplaces. And it also draws attention to their shared values which are learned and strengthened within the community of practice, and their common interest and commitment to their work. However whilst pointing to these shared values a community of practice analysis offers no understanding of how such ideas and values emerge and relate to wider social phenomena. In this sense whilst it is a powerful concept it is also limited as it offers no insight to the interplay between ideas and values and wider social figurations. However the values and ideas 'uncovered' by identifying the distance education community of practice might be described as dispositions or habitus and the concept of habitus enables

greater comprehension of the emergence and continuance of distance education in campus universities than communities of practice alone.

Habitus, is a key concept of the sociologists Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, and emphasises the assumed and unquestioned aspect of the way all members of a group perceive, think and act when they are immersed in their everyday lived practice. In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence… without any conscious concentration' (Bourdieu 1984 p.170). Using the concept of community of practice enabled the distance education habitus to be identified among the distance education workers. Habitus might be described as pre-reflective. It is neither a result of free will, nor is it determined by structures, but created by an interplay between the two over time. Habitus is shaped by past events and structures, and in turn shapes current practices and structures and also, importantly, conditions our perceptions of both.

In describing the ideas and values of the distance education interviewees as constituting a distance education habitus what is being highlighted is their common ideas concerning access to higher education in order

> 'to provide an opportunity for those, who, for one reason or another, have not been able to take advantage of higher education' (Wilson1963)[51].

And an ethic of service, (their doing of their work), whereby distance education workers endeavour to support distance education learners throughout their studies, who are, if only by their very distance from the campus, disadvantaged. Thus e.g. it was often said by the student support services in the early years of the UK OU that the open door policy, (no qualifications required - just the desire to study), should not become a revolving door. And it was the work of the

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[51] Harold Wilson at the Labour Party Conference in Scarborough

regionally based (tutors[52] and tutor counsellors[53]) that enabled this ongoing support. In the research the student support offered was very different to that provided for on campus students - it was more personalised and learner focused '*just about everybody is on an individual programme of some kind*' said PN (academic University B) and the notes kept on the departmental data base about individual students were critical to keeping this individual support going as PN stressed. This was a key reason for having departmental distance education data bases, and why they were so important and became such a site of conflict with university management. Identified and described in this way the practices of distance education workers can be understood and their 'dogged' search for 'work around' solutions becomes comprehensible and meaningful.

Habitus is a dynamic concept. People do not usually interrogate why they do things in the way they do, rather they get on with it and act in the world as the distance education workers did e.g. with 'work around' and thereby finding solutions to the obstacles rather than interrogating their ideas and values. People are not driven to act simply because they are embedded in social (economic or cultural) structures. Rather for both Bourdieu and Elias individuals have the capacity to construct and reconstruct their worlds, though not usually in an isolated and disassociated way from wider society. Habitus is a concept for both Bourdieu and Elias that describes the binding together of the 'objective' and the 'subjective' social worlds, capturing and explaining how it is that we act and think in accordance with our social context without our practices and ideas being entirely determined by social structure. Our experiences become embodied, and through these experiences we develop as Bourdieu termed it a 'feel for the game' (quoted Collyer 2015) learning the rules that become instinctive to us. Thus in our daily lives we act unconsciously according to our habitus - making choices, developing strategies and so on - as we engage with our social worlds.

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[52] Now called associate lecturers. And the post of tutor counsellors have been abolished.

[53] A role now abolished by the UK OU.

Thus the concept of habitus denies a 'simple dualism' (Morrow 2009) - structure versus agency - as the social ontology debates within sociology have often been reduced to. And the concept of habitus enables a different sociological focus - neither the macro or the micro. Rather the lens is on the process of human interdependencies. The 'dynamic interplay' (Hughes 2008 p. 179) of social and interdependent individuals which attempts to look at the process of a social feature's emergence and evolution in order to gain a fuller understanding of that feature in the present.

The spirit of distance education with its commitment to access and student support can be identified with the development of publicly funded distance education projects like the UK OU. Not only did this bring distance education to the fore as an educational methodology and philosophy, but was also part of a larger set of post second World War policy developments which saw the state having a role to play in addressing social inequality. Distance education, as reported in the chapter on the history of distance education (chapter 2), could always be understood as an egalitarian endeavour. With the birth and growing popularity of the UK OU, knowledge about distance education and its ethic to serve those who were seeking to study in this way became more widespread both in academia and among the general public. The focus of distance education was on the learner not the teacher. Since the UK OU was open to all - i.e. it did not require prior educational qualifications - attention had to be given to supporting the learner. Study materials replaced lectures and its innovative pedagogy of tutorial and educational counselling (see chapter 3) as well as harnessing of media to support learners has led many to suggest that the Open University changed the face of British higher education. (See http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/historyofou/)

Whilst the specific period of this research is many years after the establishment of the UK OU and is one in which the political perspectives that informed government policy have shifted in crucial ways (see e.g. Marquand and Seldon 1996) the core ideas about distance education gained currency among many working in adult and higher education and lived on despite the demise of the

post war Keynesian social - democratic consensus. Indeed as the UK OU has always employed many thousands of part time tutors, many of whom work(ed) in campus universities, it would be surprising if this had not happened - as for example PJ (academic University C) reported. That is to say the ideas of the distance education habitus, just as the ethics of many professions, 'live' in the minds of those who practice distance education independently of the social and political conditions in which they were first born. Indeed habitus suggests an interrelationship of the social and the psychological. Elias considered the separation of academic disciplines - history, sociology, and psychology - as unfortunate and unhelpful since all are concerned with the study of human beings and their development over time. It was from this understanding that Elias developed his concepts of 'socio-genesis' and 'psycho-genesis' which denotes the way in which changes in the social organisation of human groups has an effect on the psychological disposition of an individual and vice versa. It is therefore understandable from this perspective that distance education workers developed a spirit of distance education, an inner psyche, which led them to identify closely with their students and their struggles to study. And this habitus led them to challenge, and be despondent about, those developments within universities that, as they saw it, undermined distance education.

Distance education in the campus universities studied grew bottom up. It was not a fully developed provision that was in some way adopted in a completed form by the academic departments that developed distance education programmes. Nor did the developers have a handbook on how to implement distance education. At best they had some knowledge of the UK Open University or other departments within their university doing distance education, so they learned and developed as they went along. So not surprisingly they developed models that were very different to that of the UKOU, and even within the same university the models varied between departments. Individuals or groups of individuals within departments introduced the idea and developed their way of delivering courses. They did so for a variety of motivations as interviewees reported - altruism, a belief in access and egalitarianism, an interest in adult education and second chance. Or their first motivation   may

have been something else - even helping to find more permanent employment for short term contract researchers as DA (academic University C) wryly noted, or a desire to escape the mainstream university as RD (academic University C) observed and have more control over their own work as PN (academic University B) suggested. All, including those who joined the distance education teams after they had been established, demonstrated the distance education habitus i.e. a commitment to those who could not attend, for whatever reason, campus provision, and a powerful sense of the need to support these learners.

Distance education as the research suggested was a developing and ongoing process in campus universities. New workers joined established distance education teams attracted by the ideals and possibilities distance education offered students, or to the collegial way of working, or perhaps knowing nothing of distance education. At this point they started becoming engaged in the ways of working and the habitus of distance education after they joined as JJ (admin University A) said it was '*thrilling*' to have impact on the lives of students and to become connected with students.

The distance education habitus cannot be understood as simply the consequence of being a member of the distance education community of practice and doing distance education work. An approach which might be suggested by a simple one way socialisation process into the community. Rather habitus is a much more dynamic concept which captures the embodied traits and temperament of individuals which are personal characteristics shared by others in that social group. It is like a 'second nature or embodied social learning' (Elias 1997 p. ix) and operates largely unconsciously, functioning as an inner compass or internal steering mechanism. PS expressed it as the belief in the student focus of distance education,

> '*the collegiate nature of the work is very much driven by a shared strong sense of student centred focus. This means people want to help students, and want students to do well.*' (PS admin University A).

These views were expressed by all interviewed and seen as core to the practice of distance education. And were related to other beliefs individuals articulated e.g. about regard and respect for learners and the importance of access to higher education as both a social and individual good. DA (Academic University C) talked of valuing the learner and the difficult circumstances learners experienced combining study with work and PJ (academic University C) talked of his admiration for the ideals of the UK Open University and the moral duty to support distance education students. 'Dedication', 'caring' and 'kindness' was how SC and SG (academic and administrator at University C respectively) described the character of distance education workers. The distance education habitus unconsciously guides the distance education behaviour enabling distance education workers to act in a complex, frequently hostile environment - to 'work around' the obstacles like the regulations and 'one size fits all' approach of the university administration - since they are clear and have a vision about what they are seeking to achieve. It is in this way that the distance education habitus is habitually reproduced and honed. In effect the distance education work community and the individual distance education worker are shaped by and in turn shape each other - they are inseparable. In this way through their work distance education workers personify what they define as 'good' practice - (with its emphasis on student centredness and service to students) – and how they define themselves as distance education workers. In other words the distance education workers develop an unconscious sense of the values shared with their co-workers and of what it means to be right or wrong when developing and delivering a distance education course. This vision of what good practice in distance education looks like, means distance education workers worked around and protected their practice against those who sought to impose alternative approaches. Indeed the distance education habitus has an implied moral dimension (right and wrong) and consequently also includes emotions and feelings. These dispositions have both 'detached' or rational/cognitive aspects, e.g. 'distance education is a social good'; as well as 'involved' emotional/affective dimensions where distance education workers have empathy with distance education students and feel personally connected

to them. These emotions and feelings are integral to the identity and sense of self the distance education workers hold as many interviewees reported. They '*do the journey*' with their students as SW (University C admin) said.

It was not necessary for workers to daily revisit and restate the underpinning ideas, attitudes and values of their practice - this was assumed and was visible in action. The research process gave the interviewees the opportunity to reflect on their 'habitus' - and many said they enjoyed the process. It gave them the opportunity to surface and articulate clearly for themselves the ideas behind their practice and why they felt great discomfort with the new managerial direction of their university that was impacting their work. Mostly, as has been said, habitus operates beneath the level of discursive consciousness. It is tacit. For as McDonough (2006) suggests in her study of Toronto public sector workers whilst their habitus is 'pre-reflective, embodied and immediate', and is created and recreated through the daily practice of doing public service, it surfaces powerfully when challenged. Core to the Toronto public servants habitus is a 'traditional vision of universal good' which they will defend in the face of threats by those attempting to impose alternative visions of the state as an extension of the market. In the same spirit distance education workers constantly challenged university practices that did not have the same definition and understanding of distance education practice with its core value of student service. And this was for many years successful, as distance education workers found ways to work around and undermine systems and processes that were inappropriate, and frequently harmful, for distance education students.

Summary

This chapter has argued that the focus on distance education workers, their community of practice and habitus, offers a more compelling account for both the emergence and the continuance of distance education in campus universities than those approaches that emphasise the existence or otherwise of appropriate systems, processes or indeed technologies. However it was becoming clear during the research that not only were the opportunities for successful 'work around' being reduced, but also the communities of practice

themselves were breaking down with the rise of new managerial behaviours within universities. The following chapter looks at the consequences of this on the distance education departments of this research.

Chapter 8. Making Sense of the Data. The Managed University and the Decline of the Distance Education Community of Practice and Habitus.

Distance education did not fit into the campus environment. It did not fit the organisational structures or systems of the campus. And the campus university - at all levels - did not understand, and maybe was not sympathetic to what made distance education work - the non hierarchical team work and the student centred values that informed distance education workers' practice. Making distance education work in this context bound the distance education community together. For distance education workers, as they recounted, there were frequently contradictions between what they wanted to achieve and the university structures they worked in. For many years they could overcome these contradictions, 'work around' these difficulties whilst always remaining a marginal university provision. Making distance education work was possible because of the workers' 'supportive community of practice and their inner guiding mechanism - their distance education habitus. In this way, and for many years, distance education practice in campus universities adapted, developed and overcame the obstacles of working in an unsympathetic environment. However as many interviewees reported in more recent years this became severely limited if not impossible as the wider management of the university changed.

Much has been written about the way the public sector, including higher education in the UK, has been transformed (Beresford 2014). These transformational changes are shaped by the rise in neoliberal approaches to policy and management the roots of which began to take hold in the UK with the Thatcher government (1979 - 90) and were pursued by successive, including Labour, governments (Jenkins 2006). The form these changes have taken within the public sector in the UK are described as 'new public management' or 'new managerialism' (Clarke and Newman 1997; Clarke, Sharon, and Mclaughlin 2000). Broadly the approach seeks to impose the values, structures and processes of the market on the public sector in order to achieve efficiency

and effectiveness in the delivery of services. In the university context key elements of this approach include: a shift from professional to executive power e.g with the rise of corporate decision making processes and the decline of professional consensus decision making within departments and the wider university governance structures; a focus on 'performance' as measured by quantitative targets e.g. research outputs; and the widespread use of financial incentives e.g. with funding and promotion dependent on recipients meeting certain strategically selected and audited outcomes set by governments and university management (Kolsaker 2008). Alongside the rise of neoliberalism as a philosophy, and intricately interwoven with these new approaches to public sector management, universities have changed.

University governance has changed with the gradual rise of managerialism within the university and with the explicit aim to make academic staff more accountable and the university more entrepreneurial, adaptive and commercially responsive. This has seen the growth of practices imported from the corporate world of mission statements, executive-led strategic planning, models driven by formulae and targets, evaluation, and the enormous growth of commercial marketing with the attendant commodification of knowledge and research. University discourse commonly uses corporate and business language - brand, target, markets, pricing, customer, and CEO (Vice Chancellor) have become common parlance on campuses   as Parker (2011) notes. Deans and heads of discipline have become redefined as middle management

> '*answerable to the senior executive, rather than as discipline leaders representing their disciplinary academic constituency*' (Parker 211 p. 443).

And significantly the CEO and their senior management team wield major centralised power over plans, targets and incentives that impact on the bottom up initiatives represented by distance education. These changes and the consequences on the academy have been documented extensively (e.g.

Readings (1996), Marginson and Considine (2000) Deam and Brehony (2005), Ensor (2006), Kolsaker (2008) Macfarlane (2012) , Meek et al (2010), Jarvis (2014), Davis et al (2016).

Direct government funding, grants and subsidies have been cut requiring universities to rely on market generated revenues encouraged by government formulas that enhance income derived in this way (Parker 2011). The rationale is a belief that greater efficiency and effectiveness can be achieved by seeking greater outcomes from less cost input and with performance and outcomes being translated into quantitative and economic terms. Teaching and research are re-defined as revenue generating functions. They have become commodified (Macfarlane 2012). Distance education as represented by the mega open universities, with their industrial approach that separates the components of course delivery into specialist elements where study materials are independent of teaching and learner support (see chapter 3), it could be argued, paved the way for the commodification of knowledge. Course materials (knowledge packages) can be sold independently of any student support. Tutoring services can thereby be seen as an additional service and an additional charge on the student. Interestingly ML and MF (admin University C) in their interviews discussed the way that '*management*' choose to promote the view that distance education meant remote learning - the student and tutor should never meet. With some other interviewees the separation of student support from courseware was touched on with the growth of MOOCs (massive open on-line courses). Charging students for tuition was the model of the University of London external programme where the university supplied the syllabus and examinations and additional paid for services could be delivered by another supplier. Interestingly it was this approach that the founders of the Open University were so keen to distance themselves from. Knowing as they did that whilst it would bring in fee income (in the short term) it led to high drop out and ultimately discredited the provision.

Macfarlane, although not discussing distance education, has termed the consequences of these neoliberal approaches to managing the university as

having created the 'entrepreneurial academy' (Macfarlane 2012). The commercial concepts of business efficiency and their associated language stand in stark contrast to the Newman ideals (1852) that defined the primary purpose of universities as being both intellectual and pedagogical in order that students developed rational thought and intellectual capacity. These ideals did not require a mission statement to explain why they existed or to get '*employee buy-in to its goals,* (in order) *to get all involved passionate about why they're doing what they do*' (Kiley 2011). Rather a university's raison d'être was seen as a place which exists to encourage learning for its own sake and where value is placed on knowledge, research, inquiry, and reason. The university emphasised collegial-democratic processes, where there is diffuse management control among a community of scholars. Freedom of expression and criticism are valued and teaching and research are intimately linked and both valued (Colini 2012).

Needless to say Newman's idealistic definition of the university has always been criticised as disguising the real function of universities - the education of elites. An approach which places universities firmly within the wider power structures of society (Feeney, Hogan and O'Rourke 2017). Whilst this may be the case the Newman ideals have powerfully informed the public discourse about what a university should be about (Colini 2012). And much had been achieved in the post war years to open up access to universities and, with the development of polytechnics, to encourage higher education to offer strong community and industry links and to provide greater access and flexibility to part time students (Whitburn et al 1976). Distance education was part of this approach - most notably with the creation of the UK Open University. Distance education provided a methodology of flexibility and access as described in chapter 3 and these ideals, as has been argued, powerfully shaped the distance education habitus.

From the perspective of idealism and the Newman ideals that inform the distance education habitus 'work around' can be seen as an expression of contestation. A site of struggle where the distance education habitus is

expressed and conserved from attempts by the new university managers to modify, even destroy, the distance education habitus. Certainly the distance education workers all believed that they were in struggle with 'the university' not only to protect their students from the '*idiocies*' (PN academic University B) of the university's central administrative actions, but to preserve the very entitlement to study of distance education students since the university could not, or would not, understand what was needed to make distance education study possible (MT administrator and AS academic University A). All of the interviewees express strong attachment to and empathy for their students. This was especially the case with the distance education administrators who all emphasised their meaningful relationship with students and that this was central to the successful doing of their work. As they argued, these relationships appeared to count for nothing in the wider university. For as   Neave has described managerialism reduces all

> *'human talent, ingenuity and diversity to the single, all-encompassing descriptor of a "human resource"'. Neave (2009, p. 20)*

Many distance education administrators at Universities A and C reported that they felt diminished and undervalued. Their knowledge and experience was not recognised. And when their work was reorganised they were not consulted about what their work entailed. The new managerial group undertaking the reorganisation, it was reported, presumed they understood not only what distance education was but how it could be made more efficient and effective.

For some authors the significance of managerialism in the university does not lie in the structures of authority per se - hierarchical authority (male hierarchical authority[54]) has always existed - but in the balancing role played by collegiality (Macfarlane 2005) a symptom of which may be the shift of influence away from individual academics to the managerial elite (Kogan and Hanney 2000). Many interviewees in all three universities complained vociferously about the

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[54] Feminist writers saw universities as bastions of male power Germaine Greer (1970) .

institutional reorganisations that were taking place and were destroying their collegial, department based teams, in favour at University C of inter departmental call centres for distance education ('hubs'), managed by people who knew nothing about distance education, or the specificities of academic courses, and reporting to non academic managers. Pollitt (1990) pointed out that the declining influence of collegiality allows managers to promote the ideas and beliefs that managers make a special contribution that justifies their rights and powers. A set of beliefs that assumes the right of one group to monitor and control the activities of others. Indeed whilst many of the respondents protested vigorously to the researcher about the endless demands placed upon them to collect and report statistical information, even when it was irrelevant to their students, they supplied this information often when they knew it was meaningless and sometimes harmful to distance education (e.g. raw data on student completion). It can therefore, and contrary to seeing 'work around' as an expression of contestation, be argued that all parties by their - all be it silent compliance - contribute to the managerial discourse. Indeed as Kolsaker (2008) and Mcfarlane (2012) among others have suggested, in practice managerial discourses are bought into by many academics and administrators, especially those who benefit from it (Collyer 2015) and these discourses are formed and reformed in practice. The complex environment of organisational and political variables that normalised managerialism might suggest, as Tony Blair was wont to say, 'there is no other way'.

The collection of institutional performance information - e.g. enrolment qualifications of students, student satisfaction, student progress timelines, student use of campus services, student employment destination, academic research outputs, etc. - that distance educators reported overwhelmed them - is an aspect of the new managerialism. And as Muller (2018) has pointed out this focus on gathering 'performance' information is both costly to collect in staff time and also comes at great cost. For rather than relying on the informed judgment of those familiar with the situation the gathered data is used to guide actions, and this predictably causes (unintended) damage. For he argues metrics are often used as a substitute for relevant experience, by managers with generic

rather than specific expertise. As was occurring with the reorganisation processes happening to the distance education departments researched. However in all probability the university is unable to avoid the collection of this data. Neo Liberalism devolves decision making to the service provider (in this case the university and its departments/faculties/colleges) whilst central government maintains control through performance and outcome auditing and the creation of university league tables (Parker 2011) which have become vital to attracting students (fees) and raising investment and research funds. Inevitably as direct funding is cut, in the name of greater efficiency, universities are encouraged to seek outside funding, and inevitably teaching and research become monetised and subject to audit.

In order to manage student affairs efficiently and to assist in the capture and reporting of required audit information universities have invested in a variety of technology platforms - e.g. 'BANNER' and 'SITS'. Student records management systems are used to store, administer and manage all aspects of student information from initial enquiry and application through to congregation. Invariably and inevitably with these systems standardisation is enforced, and as respondents from all three universities reported, they are inimical to the flexibility and student focus required for distance education. For example, and expressed crudely, a part time distance education student will take longer to complete their studies and will have periods when they have to rest from their studies. This is impossible to capture within these systems without putting a negative light on university performance - and as one respondent from University C reported a senior manager informed her that they did not wish to enrol '*such* (distance education) *students*' that brought the university '*down*' in the ratings. At University C the distance education data base of a number of departments had to be abandoned for an inferior (for distance education) university wide system. The university wide system was unable to record the actual study journeys of distance education students and the processes introduced to ensure compatibility and 'fairness' between the two modes of study - e.g. the same documented and committee approved process for mitigating circumstances and extensions - led to hours of work for the distance

education administrators where once extensions to assignments could be handled within the team or, in routine cases, by the professional judgement of the distance education administrator. Time was lost for students as their case trundled and stalled through the process - fast feedback had always been seen as critical to distance education student success. The new procedures led to slow, inefficient and inappropriate student support for distance education students. MF, ML and PP distance education administrators at Universities C and B talked at length about the impact of these changes not only on their students but on their feelings of worth doing their job. Some tried to continue to keep a parallel data base - but this was specifically disallowed under rules that referred to data protection - and trying to do so was extremely demanding as PP (admin University B) reported. Inevitably students fell by the way side as decisions that had once been fixed swiftly by the distance education team awaited attenuated university processes. Distance education workers became demoralised and stressed. They felt loss of power and authority to do what they considered the best for their students. It also removed them from the intimate, supportive connection with students as they sought to justify what they regarded as unjustifiable delays and decisions, which often had significant financial implications for students too. RD noted that it did not help that the new codified university-wide regulations were drafted in an inappropriate way for distance education students, although he did feel, after he had come to understand the principles underpinning them, distance education departments could continue to '*work around*' these regulations, but he remarked

> '*why should we have to do that? 'Cos it takes an enormous amount of time and effort.*' (RD Academic University C)

The new standardisation enforced by the technology platforms also challenged the structure of the distance education curriculum. All the programmes offered by the distance education departments had multiple start dates. One reason given for this was to enable students to fall back to the next date the course was offered if, for some reason, a student needed extra time. Multiple start dates meant a student did not have to wait, perhaps for twelve months to resume their

studies. It was both a strategy for working around university regulations but also a way of supporting distance education students who without this provision would most likely not resume their studies. HD (Admin University B), among others, pointed out it had become exceedingly difficult to capture the distance education student's journey on the university wide student record system. Many conversations were being held during the interview period about whether to adapt distance education programmes to a single entry date - with the consequent compromising of their student focus and the real prospect that this would lead to drop out and poor retention levels. At the time of interview HD's department had decided to battle on - preferring to offer courses in a way that started with the needs of the students rather than the needs of the university student record system. HD did point out in despair that it was all becoming more and more   complicated as other processes became more integrated - e.g. fee collection and fee payment (especially instalment payment), library access and so forth. All of which generated standardised, automated letters to students if some rule had been breached, a problem reported by a number of interviewees who pointed out that they increasingly had to respond to confused students in receipt of these letters that did not apply to them.

Ironically, technology seen as the harbinger of the mainstreaming of distance education by so many, has, with the usage of large inflexible university wide management systems facilitated the death of student focus and flexibility - the key concepts that had defined successful distance education practice of an earlier era[55].

During the later part of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty first century even though campus universities did not provide a comfortable fit for distance education, due to the long established campus orientation of university practices and processes, the ideals and aspirations of the distance

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[55] It remains an interesting question whether or not the technology is to blame for this inflexibility or whether the managers who determined the parameters of the technology are at fault. Respondents reported no one from management talked to them about their jobs or what was important in the effective design and delivery of support systems for students studying on distance education courses. And this was my experience too when I tried to persuade the Head of College Administration in one post I held to allow an analysis of the work carried out by distance education administrators in the college before reorganising all administrators jobs. She refused to do this.

education workers enabled distance education workers to 'work around' impediments and develop small thriving cottage industries within academic departments. These cottage industries were small scale in comparison to the industrialised mega open universities (Daniel 1996) and thus did not achieve the economies of scale widely believed to determine the success of distance education (see Rumble 1997) Nevertheless these initiatives were flourishing[56] businesses that covered their costs and made surpluses for their departments as many interviewees reported and Hülsmann confirmed in his studies of costs based on his University of Oldenburg experiences (2000). These provisions were enabled by offering programmes that built on the academic expertise of the department as well as contributing to their departments. Fee income, (which departments could initially keep after paying for all their costs as well as contributing to university overheads), student numbers, reputation and geographical reach, and quality teaching materials - were benefits identified by academic interviewees. To do this work they were enabled by an academic governance at university and department level, that was more collegial and consensual. And whilst distance education was not welcomed by all in the university, as interviewees reported, in this 'relatively benign' (Kolsaker 2008) period, i.e. prior to the hegemony of managerialism, they were largely left alone to *get on with it* as DA and PJ academics at university C reported. Such distance education developments were truly entrepreneurial and pioneering in the terms Clark (2003) describes, and SC (academic University C) when describing those who set up distance education in his department called *trailblazers*' with true '*entrepreneurial spirit*'. Indeed at University C distance education for a short period, and for some departments, came to be located in what were described as 'entrepreneurial centres'.

The distance education business model that the distance education cottage industries operated with was shattered when university finance and accounting systems changed in response to the new financial arrangements of university finance departments. The university collected and retained all fee income and

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[56] Many theorists of distance eduction believed such developments were inherently unstable due to the conditions of academic staff - particularly study leave (See Rumble) They did not appreciate the distance education habitus.

top sliced costs for administration on a standard, campus informed formula. Distance education had in the past, in all universities contributed to costs that were not incurred by distance education (e.g. sports facilities), and this had always been a source of disgruntlement to distance education workers. However with the new arrangements distance education was included within its department, faculty or college on a standard formula applied to all programmes. The impact of which was to suggest that distance education did not make a profit and maybe was even a drain on the department/college/faculty.

Since a key aspect of the new managerialism across all sectors is the driving down of costs all the universities in the study were examining operational costs to achieve what was seen as value for money, efficiency and increased effectiveness. This led to major reorganisations where departments no longer controlled their own affairs in the way they had previously. Fraser (2017) observes that managerialism involves devolving budgets to middle managers. This is then wrapped up in a rhetoric that presents devolving budgetary control as being about devolution to departments and the democratisation of bureaucracies. These arguments ignore the extent to which the devolution of budgets is '*accompanied by greater strategic control from the centre*' (Fraser 2017) e.g by imposed formulas. One consequence of this devolution of budgets is further conflict within departments. Fraser (2017) argues that junior managers come to think of the budget as 'theirs', in effect creating a '*fiscal consciousness*' where departments take over the implementation and responsibilities for cuts, and thereby '*sucking many mangers into a neoliberal way of thinking*' (Fraser 2017). In this environment distance education is seen as a cost on departmental budgets. This was especially so when after the application of the funding formula, additional costs e.g. for upfront investment in materials, instructional design, part time tutors or whatever - which were not included in the university formula - were taken into consideration for distance education and came out of the allocated annual departmental funding. This was a long way away from the days when entrepreneurial income could be retained, after the relevant 'taxes' were paid to the university (CB, PJ and DA university C) and invested in ongoing distance education developments. This is exactly as Rumble (1992 and

2012) had foreseen would happen when he noted that distance education would lose its competitive advantage if costs were inappropriately apportioned and management failed to understand the model and cost drivers of distance education.

Thus whilst in the past distance education could bump along alongside other departmental activities, in the new managed environment it became seen as a costly drain on departmental resources. Non distance education staff, who might have been agnostic to distance education, now spoke up against it.

Critically for distance education the appreciation of the staffing requirements for distance education were abandoned and seen as indefensible as standardised university wide ratios for e.g. the number of administrators per student were adopted. Whilst the distance educators knew that distance education reorganised the cost base of conventional teaching (less fixed costs - e.g. buildings like lecture theatres and seminar rooms) and more variable costs (e.g. support staff - increased as student numbers increased) - this was not known or appreciated by the new managers or their non distance education colleagues. Thus the administrators supporting distance education had their jobs and responsibilities changed and/or when staff left they were not replaced on the basis they were over staffed. All of this led to mounting stress as ML and MF reported at University C. Indeed early in the interviewing schedule at one of the universities, but not in a department involved in the research, a newly introduced distance masters programme, which was unique in the country and was enrolling above expectation, had its primary academic and one and only administrator leave in the third year of presentation under the stress and lack of appreciation for the nature of their work. It was only then that the senior administrator in that department, who was responsible for staffing across the department, in a private conversation said she began to realise what was required to do distance education. It would appear that those making decisions about cost efficiency have little understanding of what the consequences of their actions might be. This is illustrated by Simpson, in a letter to the Times Higher (2016) following the slump in student numbers at the UK OU and its 7 million

pounds posted loss, who looked back to the decision of the Open University to abandon the tutor counsellor role wrote,

> *'Older OU colleagues will remember that the OU had a role called a "tutor-counsellor" whose job was to support students throughout all their modules to graduation. This was abolished on the grounds of both financial cost and a finding that only about 10 per cent of students had the same tutor-counsellor throughout their study careers – largely because of staff changes. But both these arguments were fallacious: the cost argument because no one looked into the financial benefits of increasing student retention through student support, and the continuity argument because for that vital switch from first to second module (where most OU dropout now occurs) some 90 per cent of students kept their original tutor-counsellor.'*
> (Simpson 2016)

Had the senior managers in the UK OU[57] had a grasp of the consequences of cutting out the personal support to students would they have done this leading as it has done to a more perilous financial situation? Indeed after one interview an interviewee sent, in confidence, distance education student course registration figures spanning a number of courses covering a number of years. These were plummeting. This had been one of the most successful distance education provisions in the country offered by a campus university. During, and just before the period covered by the data, distance education provision from his department had been subject to a major management led reorganisation. In addition two departments had been merged and both distance education provisions were now handled by a bank of administrators. Some newly recruited and others the old, but rapidly leaving, administrators of the previous era. The administrators were there to react to queries not to offer a proactive personalised service to individual students.   The new administrators had no experience of the distance education community of practice or habitus. Included

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[57] No longer the managers who had been involved in the set up of the Open University

with the figures was a paper for a proposed 'market strategy' for the programmes. Not one of the items for consideration covered the support that should be offered to students, or addressed what students wanted or needed. SG (administrator University C) had pointed out in her interview that the service offered to distance education students was the best recruiter of future students. That is to say word of mouth of past and present students.

Ultimately many of the distance education administrators interviewed, unable to cope with the strain, moved jobs within the university where they were able to, whilst others resigned unable to work and thrive in the hollowed out provision that was fast becoming distance education. The impact on the researcher of these 'withdrawals' from practice was referred to in chapter 4.

So far the impact of managerialism has focused on the administrative staff in departments that offered distance education courses. A central aspect of managerialism has been to control the performance of academic staff. Academic staff are now evaluated on a range of metrics focusing on their research outputs and income generation capabilities. These metrics are mainly concerned (but not exclusively) with the productivity of academics and measure such things as the number of papers in referred journals the academic has achieved and the number of citations these articles have received (Macfarlane 2012). These performance and workload measures encourage academics to work in a more individual way and the impact of this focus had, as PJ (academic University C) reported, a powerful disincentive to academic staff, especially young staff, to get involved in distance education. Distance education did not count towards getting a permanent position let alone promotion yet was a 24/7 activity leaving as SC (University C) observed with little time for anything else. SF a young academic (University B) on a temporary contract and managing the support for distance education felt he was not serving the distance education students well. Noting that what he did in distance education would have no bearing on getting a full time academic post - which was what he sought. During the period of the research academics were retreating from distance education into their disciplinary work and this impacted badly on the team and community

of practice. No performance measures addressed collective endeavours. So where academics and administrators worked closely on course presentation the withdrawal of academics meant addressing academic issues within courses slowed down and many problems were left unresolved. Or decisions were taken by junior staff making them feel unsure, insecure, exposed and vulnerable as MF and ML at University C reported. At the time they were interviewed academics at University C were looking back at distance education as a golden and special time in their professional careers that had sadly passed. The two communities that academics in distance education had happily cohabited (academic and distance education) were now in conflict.

Perhaps it was the successful distance education entrepreneurial activities that encouraged many distance education theorists, on seeing distance education developing in campus universities, to extrapolate that it would thrive, especially with the application of new technology. Inevitably it would be mainstreamed they had argued (Chapter 3). After all distance education had the capability to address the challenges universities faced like declining state funding and increased student numbers. For distance education methodology enables an increase in student numbers, provides more flexible ways of delivering education, has embedded quality assurance and can address the needs of the so called knowledge economy for life long learning (Lentell 2012). Indeed in the distance education provisions of this research, distance education provided a specialised 'product' that built on the unique specialisms of the academic departments and provided the possibility of increasing student numbers as well as fee income. As a bottom up development it did not require large up front investment. As one PVC at University C in a private conversation noted those departments at University C with successful distance education had a head start (competitive advantage) on all other universities who might have entered the international market since they knew how to do it and could enter the international student market without building expensive bricks and mortar institutions. Moreover at all three universities the teams were using relevant learning technologies - especially interactive learning technologies (VOI) in course presentation - demonstrating that with little or no increase in fixed costs,

student numbers could be increased whilst retaining the student focus. This was not to happen. Rather distance education, with its student focus, at the universities studied, found it harder and harder to continue.

These changes that had, or were having, such an impact on distance education did not happen overnight. The ideas, behaviours, systems and processes of managerialism were a slow, and often non-linear creep into the university. Distance education workers on confronting new systems, processes, and regulatory changes did as they always had done - worked around the changes to effect the best outcome for their students. In the long term - like the metaphor of the frog being slowly boiled alive - distance education workers ignored the threat to distance education as they gradually experienced it until it became impossible to continue as they had done. Besides in many ways, and taken individually, many of the managerial efficiencies e.g. the adoption of centralised systems for student registration, fee collection, and marketing could be seen as potentially beneficial (PN academic University B) even though as many noted the new systems did not configure distance education into their design and these often had to be worked around and made to work just as the previous systems had had to be. For as PN, (academic University B), reflected maybe the campus university would probably never be able to make things work for distance education.

It could be argued that had universities got this 'back office' right - allowing for the flexibility required for distance education - the departments would be enabled to concentrate on the personalised student support, or customer service, that many saw as the hallmark of successful distance education. This was never going to happen - the managerial efficiencies were the harbingers of a new managerial order. The handling of students in call centres or hubs, maximising standardised automated processes for the student study journey, and generic staff overseeing the distance education operation are an illustration of the new order.

Summary

It is the argument of this thesis that the success of the campus based distance education provisions studied rested on the collegiality of the distance education departmental teams and their distance education habitus. The supposed efficiencies and streamlining of university administrative systems introduced by senior managers has broken up, or are in the process of breaking up, the local departmental distance education community of practice and the distance education habitus that made the departmental ('cottage industry') student focused model of distance education offered in the campus universities studied so successful. And it is argued that it is this that has led to the decline of student focused distance education provision in campus universities rather than the more simple contention, which was the starting point of this research, that university management did not understand distance education. Which they do not.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

This thesis set out to try to understand how distance education came about and was/is sustained in campus universities. The dominant literature in the field suggests that distance education was either unlikely to develop, let alone sustain itself, without significant underpinnings from systems, policies and structures that were supportive of it as a methodology so different was it seen to be to traditional campus provision. This literature has largely, but not exclusively, been based upon the large, single mode open universities. There are however a considerable number of long standing distance education programmes being offered by campus universities in the UK (Chapter 2) that do not have the kind of infra structure support suggested. So this explanation fails to offer an understanding of not only how such courses came to be but also how they have been sustained over the years. On the other hand, and in complete contrast, there is the thesis that suggests that distance education is rapidly, if it is not already, integrated into campus provision so that it can be regarded as mainstreamed. The mainstreaming of distance education has been driven, it is argued, by the revolution in digital technologies which have been applied to teaching and learning at campus universities. A number of interviewees did indeed report that the selective use of these technology tools had improved provision. The mainstreaming argument it has been argued is unsupportable given the failure to look at the actual place of distance education in the wider university and not simply the technological learning tools that have been harnessed for campus study. Moreover the mainstreaming argument it has also been suggested is defective because it extrapolates from one aspect of distance education, its use of learning technologies, whilst ignoring the wider context of the campus university and particularly how it is changing with the rise of managerialism. Indeed this approach, whilst promoting the positive changes brought about by learning technologies, ignores some of the huge negative impacts university management technologies are having on distance education. Thus the mainstreaming argument draws unsupportable conclusions from the adoption of learning technologies into campus teaching and learning. Indeed it is hard to escape the harsh criticism of the mainstreaming approach that

suggests it is both technologically determinist and, as reported in chapter 3, quite literally fanciful futurology. The question therefore remained: how can the development and continuance of small scale distance education, what has been termed a cottage industry approach as opposed to industrial scale distance education, be explained. What makes it work?

In seeking to answer this question the researcher had an underlying presumption that an explanation for this must be found in the management of universities.That is where distance education was developing and thriving it must be down to management good practice. And to an extent this has been borne out but not in the way that might have been anticipated. Distance education in the campus universities studied frequently emerged within a benign management context. This should not to be seen as pro-active senior management who were ensuring organisational and logistical support for distance education. There was no evidence that senior management, through their strategic and operational planning were promoting the kind of courses that might be developed successfully for distance education study. Indeed the interview responses can be interpreted as corroborating the work of Irele (2005) that were reported in chapter three in that 'support' existed from senior management at the level of rhetoric only. However what was reported by many of the interviewees was the role of quietly encouraging and facilitative local management. This was usually from departmental heads and additionally, in the case of University C, the university secretary at the time the first distance education programmes were being set up. For in the distance education departments studied, and again confirming the work of Irele (2005), the development of distance education was bottom up. A departmental initiative. Or perhaps more precisely the initiative of a few departmental staff who had an idea about how to do things differently. These distance education workers, and the ones who came after them, were enabled to create and operationalise their ideas for distance education in their departments. They were working in what, borrowing from Fuller et al (2007), might be understood as an 'expansive' environment as opposed to a 'restrictive' one. And it was in this departmentally

supportive and facilitative environment that distance education could take off and thrive.

Distance education took off and grew, this thesis uncovers, because of two critical features: the distance education community of practice and the distance education habitus. Following the classic literature on communities of practice (Wenger 1998) the distance education communities of practice were dynamic places of learning with the application of ongoing problem solving to developing, sustaining and enhancing the joint enterprise - distance education. Those in the distance education community worked in non hierarchical teams where all participated, discussed and negotiated with others in the team, and felt empowered and happy in their work. This is not to say that work was always harmonious, debate about practice might be vigorous, but work was mutual and respectful. Stories and symbols, e.g. how they worked around university processes that disadvantaged distance education students, evolved over the years within the community to solidify the team and their approach, and which defined their identity as distance education workers. This way of working was efficient with rapid information flows and the sharing of good practice and innovation within the team. The distance education team had fast problem solving capabilities - especially as these related to student study - as well as having the ability, developed through practice, to assess the appropriateness to their distance education model of new practices e.g. specific learning technologies or administrative processes. This way of working made it possible to survive the vicissitudes of working in an environment that was not organised for distance education students.

Additionally a critical aspect of the distance education workers studied was their shared perspective and discourse, and their shared values and dispositions. What was termed in the research as their distance education habitus. The distance education habitus clustered around core values expressing the importance of meaningful access to education for all. Education was seen as a social as well as an individual good. One interviewee expressed his view that the university had a responsibility to make knowledge available to all and not

treat it as a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. The distance education habitus framed their role as distance education workers, and many interviewees articulated their moral responsibility as distance education workers to support learners and encourage them, especially as distance education was seen as a hard way to study where so many students had to overcome multiple disadvantages. The distance education habitus integrated these values and dispositions in the daily world of distance education work and guided, in what might be described as an instinctive, immediate, and unconscious way, distance education workers' practice. The distance education habitus was embodied integrally into the being of the distance education workers. The distance education workers thus intuitively approached their work from a focus on distance education students, rather than, for example, the implementation of university rules and regulations. They were there to support and help their students succeed in their studies and 'work around' the university regulations that might impede this.

The thesis then suggests that powerful though this community of practice and habitus had been in enabling the distance education workers to protect distance education from the negative consequences of university administrative processes in the past, in a similar way that McDonough (2006) describes the Toronto public sector workers doing, ultimately the distance education workers community was undermined by the new managerial practices that imposed an alternative approach to distance education, (and university education), based on efficiency and cost effectiveness. That these managerial changes, the distance education workers argued, were not evidenced based - i.e. neither efficient or cost effective - mattered not. For ultimately, as PS (admin University A) suggested they were the consequence of a neoliberal ideology that saw distance education practice, focused on good student support, good materials production, and good delivery as too costly. Whilst the costs of not maintaining good distance education practice were not factored in.

The thesis also implies, and this might be a basis for further research, that whilst distance education in name may continue, perhaps initially recruiting at

high levels as the Contact North 2017 global scan of distance education in campus universities suggests, it will be a pale imitation of what had been offered before. (Although, since no clear definition of distance education, in the Contact North and other studies is given, it is probable that as Bates (2015) has demonstrated two very different types of programme are being treated as one and the same.) Unlearned lessons of the past will apply - high drop out rates and the undermining of the methodology as fee paying students, who are under supported, fall by the way side. As the present crisis in the UK OU suggests (Simpson 2016), it will be difficult to recreate what has been lost. People will continue to work in distance education as SF (University B) on a short term contract did. And they may well know, as SF did, that they could and should do better by the distance education students, but since their employer the university does not value the kind of effort required, ultimately it will become 'just a job' where staff are infinitely interchangeable and replaceable. Over time these new distance education workers will only know this kind of degraded distance education. For communities of practice and habitus, so crucial to the high quality outcomes of the distance education studied, cannot be formed by dictate. Once they have been destroyed they may never come back - a message perhaps from the ongoing disputes within universities currently taking place. The distance education community of practice and habitus, that produces the 300%ers[58], takes root in contexts where staff are enabled, encouraged, supported, trusted and valued. And it was in this sense that the original supposition about the significance of university management in campus universities was borne out. Since fostering this kind of working environment and culture must be a responsibility of senior management.

Distance education as described in this thesis can be seen as a microcosm of what is happening in wider public service provision, as the evidence given to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health and Social Care (parliament.live tv 2018) by the professionals working in the field describe. It is the workers and their commitment to their service that make things happen. Distance education worked in campus universities first and foremost because of the distance

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[58] How distance education tutors were described (Open University 1988)

education workers. The literature of distance education failed to emphasise this, concentrating as it did so exclusively on infrastructure and technology, it ignored the very underpinnings of distance education - the distance education workers. Indeed an additional area for further research might be to explore whether this emphasis encouraged an impoverished narrative of distance education to take hold among both academics and university management. This may have provided, all be it unknowingly, an approach to reengineering the university - part time contract teachers, the use of educational technology, streamlined, automated and ubiquitous administrative operations, and the commodification of knowledge (Readings 1997).

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