

Group Leadership for Effective Contact Sessions Within the Distance Education Setting

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ABSTRACT The use of regular contact sessions, where groups of facilitators present lessons under professional guidance of a leader, has emerged as a popular mode of delivering education to distance education students in South Africa in recent years. To date, not much has been written about the role that facilitation group leaders play during such contact sessions in distance education institutions. Drawn from external service providers such as educators and other experts in education, facilitation group leaders are selected and appointed on the basis of their prior experience in teacher education as well as their current understanding of leading teams of facilitators during contact sessions. Their role as team leaders is critical for a successful organisation and effective education service delivery through the contact session model. This study sought to examine the role of facilitation group leaders in the distance education contact sessions. In this study, the researcher followed a qualitative research approach to collect data through interviews with purposely selected leaders of facilitation groups in two South African provinces. The results indicate that a positive relationship prevailed among the team members which was ascribed to experience, competency and commitment. Recommendations were that group leadership be done on a rotational basis since excellent leadership of facilitators depended on all facilitators' competency and skills which minimised the work of the group leader. These findings may inform organisations using group leader components at DE contact sessions about strategies to use when assigning facilitators to group leadership.