UNIT 14 MANAGEMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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14.0 INTRODUCTION

Programme evaluation means an objective process in which data and information about all aspects of programme that has gone before are collected, collated and analysed to make judgements. In order to understand the term 'programme evaluation' in its comprehensive sense, it is necessary to understand the structures and processes of distance education system.

In this unit, an attempt is made to outline and discuss the structure and management of a distance education institution, and to relate its functional sub-systems with one another. This unit rather forms a basis for discussions on various aspects of programme evaluation in the subsequent three units of this Block.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- outline and describe the broad structure and management of a distance education institution from a systemic angle;
- describe the management of important functional sub-systems like course design and development, media, support services, and assessment and evaluation;
- state the role of a Management Information System; and
- analyse and appreciate the issues involved in the management of distance education systems/institutions from the point of view of programme evaluation.

14.2 INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

The structure of a distance teaching institution invariably determines (and in effect gets reflected in) the organisation and management of the institution and its sub-systems. The structure is determined by the type of the institution. The institution may be an independent and autonomous one, which is usually known as 'single mode' type, or a dual-mode type in which face-to-face
education and distance education co-exist (i.e., either the same teacher teaches the on-campus students and those at distance, or there are separate teachers for each mode). Whatever the type, within an institution, the organisation may follow either a top-down approach or a collaborative-democratic (bottom-up) approach. The functional sub-systems may be independently handled and coordinated through a Management Information System (MIS) or centrally controlled and supervised. The structures and organisation will have significant impact on the nature and process of decision-making. The kind of programme evaluation exercises to be undertaken, and the utilisation of the results of such exercises within the system and its sub-systems will depend on the structural organisation of the institution concerned. In the following three sub-sections, we shall focus on different general aspects of structure and management of any distance teaching institution. This, would provide a strong base for further discussion on management of various sub-systems, and for analysis of some management issues presented in the subsequent sections of this unit.

14.2.1 Structure of Distance Teaching Institutions

Different persons have described the structure of distance teaching institutions in different ways. Let us first examine here the three kinds of management models of distance education — institution-centred, person-centred, and society-based models described by Rumble (1986):

- In the institution-centred model, there is predominance of systematic models of education i.e. every attempt is made to make the system more efficient and cost-effective. All the functionaries are assigned with key functions such as accountability and personal responsibility, and the academics work as consultants for the organisation to develop course materials (Examples: UKOU, IGNOU).

- In the person-centred model, the learner is the key person to be served, and the distance education programmes are more individualised and negotiable. The tutors/counsellors personally negotiate with and follow-up the learning of individual students (e.g. Athabasca Open University, Canada).

- In the case of society-based models, distance education materials are used in a community situation where the teacher involves all the members of the community to meet their needs through these materials. The teacher acts as a facilitator to help identify the learning goals, contents of learning, learning materials and evaluation mechanisms for the group, (e.g. Agricultural Extension Programmes; Paulo Friere's Pedagogy of the oppressed).

Freeman (1997) has identified six types of open learning systems which are based on two sets of variables: i) whether the institution is campus-based, or organisation-based, or individual-based, and ii) whether it is paced, or self-paced. The six types of open learning systems formed by combination of one variable from each group (three multiplied by two) are as follows:

- The 'paced campus-based' open learning system meets all the requirements of a formal system, viz. semester, lectures, time-table, etc. but at the same time provides for individual responsibility in learning.

- In the 'paced organisation-based' system, the need for training or continuing education arises when the work at hand so demands, rather than when the employees need it. The in-company flexible learning schemes represent this type of open learning.

- The open universities, represent the 'paced individual-based' system of open learning, as they provide for all teaching-learning materials and guidance, paced at organisation's preparedness, rather than when learners need them. There are deadlines for dispatch of materials, submission of assignments, and conduct of examinations. The learners have to obediently follow the schedule if they wish to complete the academic programme within that semester/term/duration.
• There is a lot of tutor-learner contact and interaction in the 'self-paced campus-based' system. Both tutoring and assessment are based on the needs of the individual learners. There is possibility of interaction amongst learners too.

• In the 'self-paced organisation-based system' the tutor's place is taken by the line manager, and learning takes place among learners while they are at work, rather than in the classroom.

• The old correspondence courses represent best the example of 'self-paced individual-based' open learning system, provided the institution allowed sufficient flexibility to learners to proceed at their own pace. However, this flexibility poses organisational difficulties, since the learners are at different points in the learning continuum, and there is rarely tutor-learner contact.

Irrespective of the type of the system, a distance teaching institution (DTI) usually functions within an organisational network of headquarters, regional centres, and study centres (or programme centres, work centres, etc.). While the programme development activities are largely taken care of by the headquarters, the programme implementation activities are the responsibility of the regional and study centres with centralised coordination by certain Division at the Headquarters. Within the headquarters, there are Schools or Departments of Studies which are involved in programme development activities. Support divisions manage admissions, material printing and distribution, regional services, evaluation, media production, staff training, research and evaluation and such other functions involved in programme implementation. The units such as the general administration and finance support all the above activities. While material design and development is taken care of by the teachers/academic staff the other related activities are taken care of by the other staff in the units concerned. This requires a system of well-organised and coordinated interaction and monitoring of the various units. Only then, the organisation can function effectively, and provide maximum satisfaction to its learners. You may notice here that the institutional structure does have influence on its management.

14.2.2 Principles of Institutional Management

Institution building is at the core of institutional management. An organisation tries to develop internally so that it can acquire the capacity to function progressively and leave an impact on all those concerned in the society. In other words, while it works towards showing scholarship and innovation in its operation on the one hand, on the other, it plays a proactive role towards bringing about and managing change (for the greater benefit of the society and the community). Effectiveness (achievement of predetermined objectives) and efficiency (i.e., achievement of objectives at a lower cost) are important principles of a well managed institution, which endeavours to establish its own culture and ethos.

The institution should provide flexibility and support so that every one feels proud to be associated with it. It should provide for challenges for each one to face, and progress thereby. Also it should bring in changes and innovations, and manage them to pave way for the progress of the society. For this, the institution should first evolve a policy and delegate powers, responsibilities and functions to each and every member of the organisation. The responsibilities should be fixed, and provisions be made to facilitate the individual's or group's work. The work structure/working needs to be more participative, with a common understanding by all.

The organisation has its missions, objectives and the plan of action to achieve those objectives. The policies should be flexible enough to change in the light of innovations and external changes. The organisation must, therefore, exercise the powers and carry out the responsibilities envisaged in the approved plan and as per institutional missions. This requires a direction with a clear and focused organisational policy. Necessary arrangements (in terms of work allocation, methods and procedures, resources, training, and the like) need to be made by the organisation to facilitate the work of its members. The operative responsibility and the decision-making thereof rest with the top management and hence, usually, a top-down model is followed. However, the organisation functions better and achieves more if there is adequate provision.
for a bottom-up approach to decision-making and implementation as well. The latter would develop a participative culture, greater cooperation and thus a strong institutional commitment.

There should be proper and objective communication within the organisation - the lack of it largely affects smooth functioning of the organisation and brings in lethargy, chaos and scepticism. A well developed MIS (management information system) gears the organisation towards more effective and efficient functioning.

The organisation, its functioning, its personnel and resources need to be evaluated from time to time. The evaluative function is carried out by a variety of units, which are delegated with appropriate powers by the institutional head or authority. The evaluation variables include the institution itself (its policy and missions), the personnel and their performance, the processes, the utilisation of resources, and the like. Routine monitoring and programme evaluation are strong and important mechanisms which provide feedback to the organisation for constant updating, and maintaining high level of effectiveness and efficiency. Evaluation needs to be collaborative and democratic, through involvement of the personnel concerned from within the organisation, so that there is greater possibility of utilisation of evaluation results by the institution as a whole or the sub-systems within it. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of the institution need to be indentified, and the managerial skills reshaped so as to effectively implement decisions for organisational effectiveness.

14.2.3 Institutional Decision-Making

The decision-making process within the institution determines the functioning of the organisation, as also the need for and mechanisms of programme evaluation. There are certain authorities of the institution which function and provide overall policy guidance to it within the framework of Acts and Statutes, and rules and regulations of the institution concerned. But, for the day-to-day functioning, the institution may adopt a top-down approach or bottom-up approach, or even a participatory approach to decision-making through quality circles, within the framework of total quality management (TQM). TQM implies that every functionary and every activity is directed towards a systematic achievement of organisational goals and progress. A well established management information system facilitates communication and effective decision-making.

Check Your Progress
Notes: i) Write your answers in the space given below.
   ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. List out the following?
   a) Three kinds of management models of distance education described by Rumble.

b) Six types of open learning systems identified by Freeman.
14.3 MANAGEMENT OF SUB-SYSTEMS

Though a variety of functional units operate in a distance teaching institution, the major activities of distance teaching institution centre around course design and development, development and production of media materials, provision of student support services, and continuous and term-end evaluation. These activities are carried out by a variety of functional units in the institution, operating as sub-systems. The following sub-sections discuss each one of these, which would also facilitate you in understanding the aspects of the programme evaluation concerning these and allied sub-systems.

14.3.1 Course Design and Development

The course design and development exercises are mainly handled by the teachers and academics. It has so happened that in IGNOU, for instance, the in-house faculty is largely involved in designing of academic programmes using the expertise received from outside, and course units are largely written by outside subject experts. But, in some cases, the faculty have substantially contributed to the development of course units in terms of either writing units themselves, or editing substantially the units written by others, or even rewriting completely, wherever necessary, the course units contributed by outside experts.

A team is involved in the course development activity. A course passes through many stages before it gets printed finally. Statutory bodies, external funding and collaborative agencies, in-house faculty, and market research suggest the kind of programmes to be developed. The concept paper is developed by the programme coordinator or the group of academics in a discipline/inter-disciplinary area. It is discussed in the School Council, School Board, Coordination Committee, Planning Board, Academic Council, Programme Advisory Committee, Expert Committee, etc. for giving a final shape or design. The 'concept paper' gives the rationale, objectives, level, structure, media components (like print, audio, video, practical, counselling, teleconferencing, etc.), medium of instruction (i.e., language), course design, strategy of course development, programme delivery, evaluation strategies, and certification. The role of various functional divisions and units, including regional and study centers, are chalked out before hand.

Course development is a team process involving usually the programme and course coordinators (and the faculty of the discipline outside course writers, content editor, instructional designer, language editor, copy editor, graphic artist, media producer, and the printer). Each one has an assigned role to play and is accountable. The courses are developed based on certain models (like course team model, writer-editor-faculty model, etc.), and the outcome is the self-learning print and non-print packages. Management of the entire process is a difficult and tedious one, and requires specialised skills for bringing out effective learning materials.

14.3.2 Educational Media

Educational media in a multimedia self-learning package may include audio, video, radio, television, teleconferencing, interactive multimedia, and the like. Use of media involves the tasks of designing and developing the media programmes, and providing interactive learning experiences to the learners through these media. Development of these programmes involves scripting, shooting and production, and dispatch/delivery (in packages or live) for actual use at the learner's end or at designated study or media centres.

A decision on the quantity and strategy of media use is taken at the stage of developing the concept paper for the course, and subsequent discussions on it at various forums. Once a decision is taken on the nature and the extent of media use, preparation of academic notes, academic scripts, production scripts, leading to actual programme production (in that order) will take place along with the development of printed course units either simultaneously, or at a later stage. Another decision concerns the media choice/policy: supplementary, complementary or integrated. These decisions do affect the design and development of media materials. Managing a media production crew, and adopting an academic-produce-
collaborative approach to development of media materials require sufficient experience and patience. At times, for instance, it may so happen that off-line editing and preview of programmes continue for indefinite period, giving greater strain to the producer, the academic and the exchequer. In the process, the material may get too delayed to be used by the learners. Effective involvement of instructional designers, formative evaluation, and quick decision-making usually help the timely production of good quality programmes that can be very useful to the learners.

14.3.3 Student Support Services

Management of student support services involves: interaction and coordination with the Schools of Studies and other service units of the institution, management of regional centres/study centres/work centres/web centres, management of material distribution and other communication to learners, management of assignments (continuous evaluation) and counselling, training of support personnel, liaison with outside society and institutions, and management of the provision of individualized support to learners. Timely admission of students, despatch of study materials and all communications to learners, proper conduct of counselling sessions, efficient handling of turn around time of assignments and their reliable evaluation, maintenance of a continuous feedback and communication system require competent and committed functionaries with specialised skills.

Tutors and counsellors (i.e. Academic Counsellors) are the most crucial agents of distance teaching-learning; they act as subject experts, feedback providers, mentors, assessors, and information providers. Management functions of these roles include: setting the role, monitoring and supporting the role, and evaluating the role for continuing professional development. Management of support also includes the support of self-help groups, and peer groups. Sometimes, slow learners and below average learners may need extra support. This involves strong and sustained mentoring. Further, the learners may need extra workplace support and guidance. Workplace learning skill development, workplace projects, workplace log books and diaries are important mechanisms which need to be managed properly to provide extra support to such learners.

14.3.4 Evaluation System

Evaluation of distance learning involves continuous and final (term-end) evaluation. Continuous evaluation requires assessment of tutor and computer marked assignments, individual and group projects, experiments and hand-on on-line tests. The final evaluation is done through examinations. Decisions need to be made regarding the procedures and formats of the assessment, what tests to give, when to give, how frequently, the level of testing, and the workload involved in preparing, conducting and responding to such tests. Management of computer-based tests needs alertness, immediacy, on-line response system, on-line updating, individualized pacing, and flexibility regarding the timing of these tests. Multiple-choice questions need to be generated and validated for on-demand and on-line assessment and immediate feedback.

Management of assessment of assignments, and examinations is very complex and difficult to handle due to wide geographical distribution of learners, and individualised pacing of learning. However, learners need to be constantly informed about the evaluation activities so that they can make appropriate decisions at appropriate time.

Check Your Progress

Notes: i) Write your answers in the space given below.
   ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

2. How do you distinguish the management of course development from management of student support services.
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14.4 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

The MIS includes collection, processing and retrieving of information at continuous intervals for the effective management. To be able to make better and informed decisions, information or data regarding the inputs, processes and outputs of the system, as also constraints, if any, is very essential. A SWOT analysis, (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats,) based on an effective MIS, becomes more effective for constantly helping the organisation move forward, and for the effective management of any change. The MIS, as different from a mere information system, must equip the decision-maker to take informed decisions regarding inputs, processes and outputs. The MIS, therefore, should be continuous, timely, accurate and relevant.

In a distance teaching institution (DTI) there must be a nodal unit, which collects, processes, and retrieves information concerning all aspects of the institution and its operational (and other) networks. The unit needs to constantly dialogue with user or initiator-experts to collate and make available information to the appropriate authorities and others to enable them take right decisions. However, control as a factor affects the style of functioning of the middle and upper level MIS operators who want to control, rather than disseminate. Unless informed decisions are made, the functionaries involved in the sub-systems may become skeptic, and may not provide information to the nodal unit. This calls for proper management of management information system. It is necessary to programme the collected information and provide it (except those information which may have been decided to be kept confidential) freely through, say, the local area network (LAN) of computers or in appropriate form suitable to the requirement.

14.5 MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Managing a DTI and its sub-systems involves consideration of a host of variables constantly affecting the progress of the institution and the quality of management itself. In the following sub-sections we shall focus on some of the important variables which need to be constantly toned for the institution to function effectively.

14.5.1 Quality Control and Service Management

Quality, though an elusive concept, needs to be defined, its indicators developed, processes outlined, and actions taken by all those involved at the input, process and output stages of any activity controlled. Quality, defined by (Guri, 1989), refers to a product’s fitness for purpose. Quality, in industrial terms, is defined as error-free, totally reliable products or services and customers measure the quality of a product by how well it fulfills their expectations at a given time (Holt, 1990). These definitions may not be sufficient to explain the processes of activities which are crucial to quality learning. Nevertheless, what is important is quality control, which according to Guri (1989) is “primarily an action which adjusts operations to predetermined standards”. Quality, control and quality assessment mechanisms do contribute to organisational effectiveness and performance; but this needs to be located from the points of view of all the stake-holders: the authorities, the faculty and the staff, the students, the parents, the government and funding agencies, the employers, and the public. Performance indicators for all the sub-systems may be developed and adhered to by all those concerned, so that fulfillment of individual responsibility at a given level of performance may be achieved. However, one may realise that these indicators may not fully explain the issue of quality. Some qualitative aspects need to be handled through continuing professional development and experiential learning by the functionaries; and in fact the level of quality depends on the level of professionalism and of the human resources engaged in distance teaching. The major considerations are related to the quality of learning materials, and the service offered to the learners - be it information, material despatch, counselling, examination, and so on. Simple marketing approach may not fully help to cope with the situation, as it needs full commitment of the providers/functionaries in reaching out to their clients.
14.5.2 Accountability

Once tasks are allocated and responsibility is fixed, it becomes necessary to monitor the process continuously. Each and every functionary needs to be held accountable to the tasks undertaken. An open system, with constant communication and the commitment to contribute (rather than distract), develops more faith in the system and its functioning. Unlike face-to-face teaching where the teacher(s) is/are solely responsible for teaching distance education involves team work. Everyone’s contribution is crucial to the success of the system and its processes. With proper balance between autonomy - administrative, academic, and financial - and accountability, one may expect to reap more benefits from the functioning of the system.

14.5.3 Management of Technological Innovations

Distance education, of late, has tended to largely depend on technologies of delivery and interaction. Technologies may be involved in the development of materials, but largely communication and information technologies like audio, video, radio, television, teleconferencing, internet, and the like are used for delivery of learning (which is now called ‘distributed learning’). Technologies like computers (and LAN and WAN) are involved in the operation of the system, information storage and dissemination, and development of learning packages. Maintenance of such systems are difficult, and crucial as well for the operational success of the distance education sub-systems. Further, technologies like teleconferencing and radio counselling may involve large networks which need to be maintained and managed. Therefore, choice of appropriate technologies and their compatibility with future technological developments are crucial in the management of technological innovations. Ultimately, the measure of success lies in determining whether technology is helping in doing things more effectively and whether it is facilitating effective and active learning by learners.

14.5.4 Marketing

DTIs are constantly engaged in marketing their products, services and brand. Distance education, especially in the professional areas and for continuing professional development, has become more competitive in ensuring quality, appropriateness and flexibility in programme offerings for the prospective clients. Quality assurance and accreditation have become issues to be dealt with properly.

However, in any case, two things are very crucial:

i) distance education needs to be marketed internationally (if one is convinced of its quality in-house); and

ii) quality of service needs to be greatly increased to be professional in one’s approach.

14.5.5 Networking

Networks, networking and collaboration have been crucial to effective functioning of DTIs. Networking may involve networking within the organisation, technological networking (including virtual networking) all over the world, human networking for development or rich (and appropriate) self-learning packages and for their effective delivery to learners, and resource networking and collaboration to increase effectiveness and to reduce cost. Such networks may lead to credit transfers amongst institutions, joint degree programmes, and joint development and sharing to teaching-learning resources. The networks, networking, and the processes involved in these need to be managed carefully; and this is a very sensitive area to be handled with utmost caution.
Check Your Progress

Notes:

i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

3. Write down your views on improving and proper management of marketing services.

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14.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we focused on the structure, organisation and management of distance teaching institutions, and their sub-systems. You would have noticed that for effective functioning of distance teaching institution, there should be proper networking, communication, team work, clear responsibilities, an effective MIS, and collaborative-democratic decision-making. The activities of units or divisions involved in the course design and development, media, student support services, assessment and evaluation system, MIS and networking, amongst others, need to be handled and managed carefully for higher organisational effectiveness, organisational quality, and learners’ satisfaction. An understanding of all these is crucial to the design, conduct, and implementation of a regular monitoring and programme evaluation. You will learn more about various aspects of programme evaluation in the subsequent three units of this block.

14.7 ANSWERE TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. a) The three kinds of management models of distance education described by Rumble are:

i) institution-centred model

ii) person-centred model, and

iii) society-based model.

b) Freeman has identified six types of open learning systems. They are:

i) paced-campus-based open learning system

ii) paced-organisation-based open learning system

iii) paced-individual-based open learning system

iv) self-paced-campus-based open learning system

v) self-paced organisation-based open learning system, and

vi) self-paced individual-based open learning system.

2. In the case of course design and development, academics are involved, and the exercise is largely academic in nature with little logistical decision-making, while in student
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support services the exercise is largely logistical and managerial/administrative in nature guided by academic concerns. In the latter, though the teachers are involved in the evaluation of assignments and in presentation of counselling sessions, the management by coordinators of Study Centres and of Regional Directors of Regional Centres largely involves administrative and managerial decision-making. However, in both the cases, the concern is to facilitate and improve student learning.

3. Marketing is a specialised activity; and marketing of distance education mechanisms, products and services need to be a more specialised activity. The DTI may centrally market materials, services and expertise or decentralise the operation up to the level of study centres. Outsourcing may be done in which publishers and distributors do it, with a fixed royalty paid to the institution. For international marketing, rigorous and sustained advertisement, display and involvement in international activities are very essential.