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IN SEARCH OF THE LATENT STRUCTURE OF AN e-LEARNING PRACTITIONER CONSTRUCT

by

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ABSTRACT

In this study systems thinking approaches were applied to uncover the structure of the e-learning practitioner **construct.** Assumptions abducted from the systemic view of the e-learning practitioner construct hold that the e-learning practitioner system involves the e-learning practitioner and the e-learning practice as two subsystems that interact in the e-learning work environment. The characteristics of the subsystems are patterned to reflect their respective structures, which collaboratively construe the structure of the e-learning practitioner system.

Different lenses were used to take 'snapshots' and to illuminate the separate parts (the environment, the e-learning practitioner and the e-learning practice) of the system and to tell the e-learning practitioner's story. Work behavioural styles expressed in terms of DISC language were used to describe a particular aspect of work personality structure. A personality-orientated job analysis, namely the Human Job Analysis, was used to identify and describe job characteristics and job structure. Person characteristics from the individual and characteristics from the job are the inputs into the e-learning practitioner system, and through a process of reciprocal interaction lead to certain outputs, for example person-job (P-J) fit, moderated by environmental influences, and constantly monitored by feedback systems.

Environmental changes act as drivers in the system and practical interventions, such as the implementation of support programmes, job redesign and career development, may be applied as leverage points to change the output, for example to create a number of P-J fit scenarios. The characteristics of each subsystem and their relationships form the building blocks of the system structured in an **e-learning P-J fit triad**. Triad congruence is dependent on the characteristics of each leg of the triad, as well as influences and drivers from the environment. The different parts work together towards a specific goal according to a specific plan driven by organising principles to fulfil a common purpose, which gives meaning to the system. Different scenarios may alter the congruence of these three legs, which may then emerge in different configurations from their latent position.

To gain a better understanding of this construct, a case study was applied focusing on the characteristics and work behavioural styles of e-learning practitioners in the e-learning work environment at the Tshwane University of Technology. A **bricolage** of data collection methods

and instruments was applied to collect evidence for answering the research questions. Rich and varied sources of data, for example interviews, participant observation, documents and archival records, were tapped during the data collection phase. Data analysis included **quantitative and qualitative analysis**, and reasoning though both inductive and abductive logic.

Synthesis of these research findings resulted in a classifying scheme as a form for expressing the latent structure of the five possible e-learning scenarios to answer the main research question: "**What is the latent structure of the e-learning practitioner construct?"**

The study focused on the creation of knowledge about the 'goodness of fit' between the e-learning practitioner and the e-learning job in the e-learning environment by using the combined languages of systems thinking and the DISC profiling system.
The uniqueness of this study pertains to the following:

- the interplay between the characteristics of e-learning practitioners, the e-learning practice and the e-learning environment;
- P-J fit scenarios in the e-learning environment, and
- a classification scheme for the e-learning practitioner construct displaying five categories, namely job structure, job theme, person attributes, roles and applications against the dimensions of an environmental structuredness continuum.

Findings from this research may support initiatives to establish benchmarks for the e-learning practitioner job description. Practical applications may be useful to **practitioners** using electronic learning management systems and to **planners** of **staff development and e-learning training programmes**.

Keywords
e-learning; e-learning practitioner; e-learning practice; Person-Job fit, behavioural style; latent structure; interactionist model, e-learning practitioner system; unstructured environment; structured environment.

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University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: FRAMEWORK FOR THIS STUDY 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION 2

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY 4

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY 8

1.4 STUDY TITLE ISSUES DEFINED 10

1.5 THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY 13

1.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS 14

1.7 THE RESEARCH APPROACH 19

1.8 CONTEXT 19

1.8.1 BACKGROUND 19
1.8.2 THE TUT E-LEARNING PRACTITIONER ENVIRONMENT 22
1.8.3 NATIONAL CONTEXT 24
1.8.4 INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT 24

1.9 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY 25

1.9.1 WHAT IS EXCLUDED FROM THE STUDY? 27
1.9.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 27
1.9.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 28

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 29

1.11 THE RESEARCH DESIGN 30

1.12 THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES 37

1.13 STRUCTURE OF THESIS 41

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE STUDY 42

2.1 INTRODUCTION 44

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW APPROACH 46

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW PURPOSE AND ACTIVITIES 46

2.3.1 INVESTIGATION OF THE WIDTH AND DEPTH OF THE STUDY FIELD 47
2.3.2 INFORMATION ON THE MAIN FOCUS AREAS OF THE STUDY 47
2.3.3 IDENTIFY RESEARCH TOPICS TO FRAME THE RESEARCH PROBLEM. 48
2.3.4 REVIEW AND ANALYSE LITERATURE RESOURCES 48

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS 49

2.5 MAIN FOCUS AREAS RELEVANT FOR THIS STUDY 52

2.6 DISCUSSION OF MAIN FOCUS AREAS 53

2.6.1 LATENT STRUCTURE 53

2.6.1.1 Latent structure – the taxonomic approach 53

2.6.1.2 Latent structure – systems thinking approach 56

2.6.2 CONSTRUCT 57

2.6.3 E-LEARNING WORK ENVIRONMENT 59

2.6.3.1 Introduction 60

2.6.3.2 Clarification of the e-learning concept 64

2.6.3.3 Historic overview of e-learning development 68

2.6.3.4 Issues and controversies regarding e-learning 68

2.6.3.5 A snapshot of global and national research trends in e-learning 74

2.6.3.6 Policy issues in e-learning 78

2.6.3.7 Emerging issues and challenges in e-learning 80

2.6.4 E-LEARNING PRACTICE 89

2.6.4.1 Introduction 90

2.6.4.2 Clarification of the e-learning practice concept 93

2.6.4.3 Issues and controversies regarding e-learning practice 96

2.6.4.4 A snapshot of global and national research trends in e-learning practice 99

2.6.4.5 Emerging issues and challenges in e-learning practice 103

2.6.4.6 Relationship between job and personality 105

2.6.4.7 Choices and research questions 112

2.6.5 E-LEARNING PRACTITIONER 113

2.6.5.1 Introduction 114

2.6.5.2 Clarification of the e-learning practitioner concept 116

2.6.5.3 Challenges and key issues for e-learning practitioners 119

2.6.5.4 Development of a preliminary taxonomy 123

2.6.5.5 Definition of personality in the work context 131

2.6.6 E-LEARNING PRACTITIONER–E-LEARNING PRACTICE FIT IN THE E-LEARNING CONTEXT 134

2.6.6.1 Introduction 135

2.6.6.2 Conceptualisations of P-E fit 138

2.6.6.3 Person-job fit research 142

2.6.6.4 Person-organisation fit for virtual organisations 144

2.7 THEORETICAL INTEGRATION OF THE STUDY 146

2.7.1 PRINCIPLES OF SYSTEMS THEORY RELEVANT TO THIS STUDY 152

2.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 155

2.9 SUMMARY 158

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY 159

3.1 INTRODUCTION 160

3.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION 161

3.2.1 RESEARCH SUBQUESTIONS 161

3.3 RESEARCH PROCESS 161

3.3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHICAL AND PARADIGM ISSUES 162
3.3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH 171
3.3.3 LOGIC OF REASONING 176

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN 183

3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY/METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDY 185

3.5.1 RATIONALE FOR USING THE CASE STUDY APPROACH 187
3.5.2 CASE STUDY FEATURES 189
3.5.3 CASE STUDY APPLICATIONS 189
3.5.4 THE CASE STUDY IN QUESTION 190
3.5.5 APPLICATION AND PARTICIPANTS 192

3.6 RESEARCH METHODS: MIXED METHOD APPROACH 193

3.6.1 SURVEY METHOD – EXPLORATORY PHASE 197
3.6.1.1 Uncovering the characteristics of e-learning practitioners from the international domain 197
3.6.1.2 Meta-analysis of e-learning practitioner characteristics as described in the literature 197
3.6.2 SURVEY METHOD – SCREENING SURVEY 198
3.6.3 SURVEY METHOD – PILOT SURVEY 198
3.6.3.1 Development of questionnaire: "What is an e-learning practitioner?" 199
3.6.3.2 Validation of questionnaire 199
3.6.3.3 Pilot survey for Partners in the P@W Programme 199
3.6.3.4 Discussion on alternative data collection methods 200
3.6.3.5 Streamlining the process by narrowing the focus 200
3.6.3.6 Choosing validated measuring instruments for profiling 201
3.6.3.7 Narrowing the focus to e-learning practitioners at TUT 202
3.6.4 ETHNOGRAPHY METHOD – DATA COLLECTION METHODS 203

3.7 SOURCES OF EVIDENCE 203

3.8 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS 208

3.8.1 DISC PROFILING 209
3.8.1.1 DISC behavioural style profiling 209
3.8.1.2 The development of the DISC profiling system 209
3.8.1.3 The DISC behaviour styles 210
3.8.1.4 Description of DISC Factors 212

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

3.8.1.5 What is a Thomas Personality Profile? *215*
3.8.1.6 PPA for e-learning practitioners at TUT *215*
3.8.1.7 Introduction to HJA *218*
3.8.1.8 Benchmarking the job of the e-learning practitioner at TUT *219*
3.8.2 INTERVIEW 223
3.8.3 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION 223
3.8.4 INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUP 224
3.8.5 EXPERT CONSENSUS GROUP 224
3.8.6 DOCUMENTATION 224
3.8.7 ARCHIVAL MATERIAL 225
3.8.8 SELF-REPORTED FEEDBACK 226
3.9 MODE OF DATA ANALYSIS 227
3.9.1 COMPUTER ANALYSIS 228
3.9.2 ANALYSIS BY EXPERT CONSENSUS FOCUS GROUP 229
3.9.3 ANALYSIS BY VIRTUAL GROUP 230
3.9.4 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS 230
3.9.4.1 Data reduction: textual analysis *230*
3.9.4.2 Quantitative content analysis *233*
3.10 QUALITY CRITERIA 234
3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS 238
3.11.1 DESCRIPTION OF PRACTICES USED IN THIS STUDY 238
3.11.1.1 Professional ethics *238*
3.11.1.2 Enrichment of data *239*
3.11.1.3 Participation of human participants *239*
3.11.1.4 Subject approval and informed consent *240*
3.11.1.5 Risks and disadvantages to participants *240*
3.11.1.6 Benefits and advantages to participants *240*
3.11.1.7 Confidentiality, anonymity and trust *241*
3.12 SUMMARY 241
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS 242
4.1 INTRODUCTION 243
4.2 THE RESEARCH GOALS AND QUESTIONS 244
4.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 244
4.3.1 UNCOVERING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF E-LEARNING PRACTITIONERS - INTERNATIONAL DOMAIN 245
4.3.1.1 Preliminary taxonomy *247*
4.3.1.2 Screening survey *248*
4.3.1.3 Development of questionnaire: What is an e-learning practitioner? *249*

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

4.3.2 PERSONAL PROFILE ANALYSIS FOR E-LEARNING PRACTITIONERS AT TUT 249
4.3.2.1 Behavioural characteristics of e-learning practitioners 252
4.3.2.2 Creating profiles of the e-learning practitioners 252
4.3.2.3 Description of DISC behaviour styles in each factor 255
4.3.2.4 Enrichment of personal profiles of e-learning practitioners at TUT 259
4.3.2.5 Analysis of questionnaires 286
4.3.3 PERSONAL PROFILE ANALYSIS FOR PARTNERS IN THE P@W PROGRAMME 289
4.3.3.1 Completion of the PPA form 291
4.3.3.2 Analysis of PPA forms 291
4.3.3.3 Creating a profile of the Partners 291
4.3.3.4 Enrichment of personal profiles of the Partners from the P@W Programme 301
4.3.4 SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON PERSON CHARACTERISTICS 308
4.3.4.1 The Personal Profile DISC factor and style combinations 309
4.3.4.2 Enrichment of the personal profiles of the e-learning practitioner 317
4.3.5 SUMMARY 322

4.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 2 324

4.4.1 META-ANALYSIS OF E-LEARNING PRACTITIONER CHARACTERISTICS 324
4.4.1.1 Discussions on the work behaviour profiles 326
4.4.1.2 Analysis of the e-learning practitioner job at TUT 326
4.4.2 HJA FOR THE E-LEARNING PRACTICE AT TUT 330
4.4.2.1 Reflection on the expert consensus group discussion 333
4.4.2.2 HJA graph as perceived by the ECG 337
4.4.2.3 Analysis of received data 338
4.4.2.4 Interactive refinement of the HJA 340
4.4.2.5 Master Graph Document 341
4.4.2.6 Synthesis of Master Job Profile 343
4.4.2.7 Validating the Master Job Profile by creating an actual benchmark 344
4.4.2.8 Full description of the HJA 345
4.4.2.9 Enrichment of the HJA 347
4.4.2.10 Synthesis of job characteristics for the e-learning practitioner at TUT 352
4.4.3 ACTUAL BENCHMARK FOR THE JOB REQUIREMENTS OF PARTNERS 354
4.4.3.1 Description of job requirements for Partners in a structured environment 356
4.4.3.2 Validation and full description of HJA for Partners 356
4.4.3.3 Enrichment of HJA – 361
4.4.3.4 Analysis of data based on the Tett and Burnett (2003) model 362
4.4.4 SYNTHESIS OF JOB CHARACTERISTICS 374
4.4.5 SUMMARY 374

4.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 3 377

4.5.1 INTRODUCTION: - ANALYSIS OF P-J FIT OF THE E-LEARNING PRACTITIONER 377

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

4.5.2 THEME 1: P-J FIT ANALYSIS IN THE DIFFERENT DOMAINS 381
4.5.2.1 International domain focus area 1: HJA (CD/SI) 382
4.5.2.2 International domain focus area 2: HJA (CDS/I) 396
4.5.2.3 TUT domain focus area 3 : HJA (DI/CS) 409
4.5.2.4 TUT domain focus area 4 : HJA (SCD/I) 423
4.5.2.5 Theoretical domain focus area 5 : HJA (DIC/S) 436
4.5.3 THEME 2: COMPARISON OF JOB COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN THE GROUPS 449
4.5.3.1 Integration of findings on P-E fit 449
4.5.3.2 Integration of findings on P-E fit in the different groups 453
4.5.4 SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS TO ANSWER THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION 460
4.5.4.1 First scenario highlighting the structure of the e-learning practitioner construct 461
4.5.4.2 Second scenario highlighting the structure of the e-learning practitioner construct 464
4.5.4.3 Third scenario highlighting the structure of the e-learning practitioner construct 468
4.5.4.4 Fourth scenario highlighting the structure of the e-learning practitioner construct 472
4.5.4.5 Fifth scenario highlighting the structure of the e-learning practitioner construct 475

4.6 SUMMARY 478

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 480

5.1 INTRODUCTION 481

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY 481

5.3 FINDINGS AND RESULTS COLLECTED FROM THE RESEARCH 484

5.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 484
5.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2 487
5.3.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3 490
5.3.4 SYNTHESIS 493

5.4 DISCUSSION 496

5.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION 496
5.4.2 SUBSTANTIVE REFLECTION 499
5.4.3 SCIENTIFIC REFLECTION 508
5.4.4 PERSONAL REFLECTION 512

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS 512

5.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE 512
5.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 517

5.6 FINAL WORD 518

REFERENCES 1

APPENDICES 550

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Explanatory detail of subquestions....15
Table 1.2: Research goals and refined subsidiary questions....16
Table 1.3: Summary of research design....32
Table 1.4: Research timetable....37
Table 1.5: Structure of thesis....41
Table 2.1: Observations on trends and issues in the e-learning work environment....61
Table 2.2: Summary of current issues in e-learning....69
Table 2.3 Internet users and population statistics for Africa....72
Table 2.4 Internet usage statistics for Africa....73
Table 2.5: Observations regarding trends and issues in e-learning practice....91
Table 2.6: Observations regarding trends and issues in e-learning practitioner main focus areas....115
Table 2.7: Technical skills....123
Table 2.8: Curriculum skills....124
Table 2.9: Management skills....124
Table 2.10: Teaching skills....125
Table 2.11: Personal/affective skills....125
Table 2.12: Communication skills....126
Table 2.13: Teaching styles....126
Table 2.14: Personality attributes....127
Table 2.15: Learning styles....127
Table 2.16: Observations regarding trends and issues in P-J fit....136
Table 3.1: Summary of WebCT activities for 2005....190
Table 3.2: Experience as e-learning practitioner at TUT....192
Table 3.3: Total e-learning population at TUT....192
Table 3.4: Research techniques with respect to the research questions....203
Table 3.5: Sources of data....204
Table 3.6: Comparison of the different work behaviour styles....211
Table 3.7: DISC Sub-traits....213
Table 3.8: Data collection and data analysis timeline....228
Table 4.1: Preliminary taxonomy of the characteristics of e-learning practitioners....247
Table 4.2: Personal profile patterns of the TUT e-learning practitioner group....253
Table 4.3: Selection criteria for star performers....261
Table 4.4: Profile distribution of the star performers in the TUT e-learning practitioner group....262
Table 4.5: Illustration of behavioural styles of some star performers....267
Table 4.6: Applications in the e-learning environment by Dominance behavioural styles....269
Table 4.7: Self-reported feedback from high Dominance group....269
Table 4.8: Applications in the e-learning environment by DI behavioural styles....271
Table 4.9: Self-reported feedback from DI style combination....271
Table 4.10: Applications in the e-learning environment by ID behavioural styles....273
Table 4.11: Self-reported feedback from Influence Dominance group....273

Table 4.12: Applications in the e-learning environment by ICD behavioural styles....275
Table 4.13: Self-reported feedback from ICD group....275
Table 4.14: Applications in the e-learning environment by the IS behavioural style....276
Table 4.15: Applications in the e-learning environment by SD behavioural styles....277
Table 4.16: Self-reported feedback from SD group....278
Table 4.17: Applications in the e-learning environment by SC behavioural styles....279
Table 4.18: Self-reported feedback from SC group....280
Table 4.19: Applications in the e-learning environment by C behavioural styles....281
Table 4.20: Self-reported feedback from C group....281
Table 4.21: Applications in the e-learning environment by the CD behavioural style....282
Table 4.22: Self-reported feedback from CD group....283
Table 4.23: Applications in the e-learning environment by the CS behavioural style....284
Table 4.24: Self-reported feedback from CS group....284
Table 4.25: Applications in the e-learning environment by the CSI behavioural style....285
Table 4.26: Self-reported feedback from CSI group....286
Table 4.27: Descriptive words from e-learning practitioners from TUT group....288
Table 4.28: Personal profile DISC factor and style distribution of the Partner group....293
Table 4.29: Analysis of descriptive words....307
Table 4.30: Comparison of the DISC styles in the different groups....310
Table 4.31: Analysis of words describing the characteristics of the e-learning practitioner....320
Table 4.32: Comparison of the characteristics of e-learning practitioners at TUT....321
Table 4.33: Frequency of choices on the individual HJA forms....332
Table 4.34: Selected HJA statements....333
Table 4.35: Summary of discussion on HJA statements....334
Table 4.36: Summary of responses on the Master Job Graph Interpretation....342
Table 4.37: Frequency of HJA scores from TUT e-learning practitioners....349
Table 4.38: Frequency of HJA scores from Partners....349
Table 4.39: Comparison between HJA's as perceived by different groups....351
Table 4.40: Summary of influences on online teacher/facilitator/e-moderator's role....363
Table 4.41: Summary of influences on instructional designer's role....364
Table 4.42: Summary of influences on adult learner's role....366
Table 4.43: Summary of influences on researcher's role....368
Table 4.44: Summary of influences on project manager's role....369
Table 4.45: Frequency of style combinations in TUT population....384
Table 4.46: P-J fit scores for the TUT population : HJA (CD/SI)....385
Table 4.47: Frequency of style combinations of the TUT e-learning practitioner group....389
Table 4.48: P-J fit for the TUT e-learning practitioner group : HJA (CD/SI)....390
Table 4.49: Frequency of style combinations of the star performer group....391
Table 4.50: P-J fit scores for the star performer group : HJA (CD/SI)....392
Table 4.51: Frequency of style combinations of the Partner group....394
Table 4.52: P-J fit scores for the Partner group : HJA (CD/SI)....395
Table 4.53: P-J fit for the TUT population : HJA (CDS/I)....398
Table 4.54: P-J fit for the TUT e-learning group : HJA (CDS/I)....401
Table 4.55: P-J fit for the star performer group : HJA (CDS/I)....404

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

Table 4.56: P-J fit for the Partner group : HJA (CDS/I) 407
Table 4.57: P-J fit for the TUT population : HJA (DI/CS) 412
Table 4.58: P-J fit for the TUT e-learning practitioner group : HJA (DI/CS) 415
Table 4.59: P-J fit scores for the star performer group : HJA (DI/CS) 418
Table 4.60: P-J fit scores for the Partner group : HJA (DI/CS) 421
Table 4.61: P-J fit for the TUT population : HJA (SCD/I) 426
Table 4.62: P-J fit for the e-learning practitioner group : HJA (SCD/I) 429
Table 4.63: P-J fit for the star performer group : HJA (SCD/I) 432
Table 4.64: P-J fit for the Partner group : HJA (SCD/I) 435
Table 4.65: P-J fit for the TUT population : HJA (DIC/S) 439
Table 4.66: P-J fit for the e-learning practitioner group : HJA (DIC/S) 441
Table 4.67: P-J fit scores for the star performer group : HJA (DIC/S) 444
Table 4.68: P-J fit scores for the Partner group : HJA (DIC/S) 447

University of Pretoria etd - Johannes, H (2007)

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Graphical presentation of the layout of Chapter 1 1
Figure 1.2: Bricolage used to address the research problem 36
Figure 2.1: e-Learning person-job fit triad 42
Figure 2.2: Structural layout of Chapter 2 43
Figure 2.3: Literature review proces 51
Figure 2.4: e-Learning work environment in person-job fit triad 59
Figure 2.5: Layout of the sections on the e-learning work environment 60
Figure 2.6: Adopter categories defined by Rogers (1995) 81
Figure 2.7: S-Curve 84
Figure 2.8: e-Learning practice in the person-job fit triad 89
Figure 2.9: Layout of the section on e-learning practice 90
Figure 2.10: A model for effective practice in e-learning (adapted from JISC, 2004a:49 94
Figure 2.11: A framework for modelling e-learning practice 95
Figure 2.12: Statements of good e-learning practice 98
Figure 2.13: e-Learning practitioner in the person-job fit triad 113
Figure 2.14: Layout of the sections on the e-learning practitioner 114
Figure 2.15: Position of the three legs in the person-job fit triad 134
Figure 2.16: Layout of the sections on P-J fit 135
Figure 2.17: Conceptualisation of the multidimensional nature of P-E fit 140
Figure 2.18: A dynamic interactionist model of the e-learning practitioner system 151
Figure 2.19: Conceptual framework 157
Figure 3.1: The research process 159
Figure 3.2: Graphical presentation of the layout structure of Chapter 3 160
Figure 3.3: Holistic view of the e-learning practitioner system 178
Figure 3.4: Nested e-Learning environments 179
Figure 3.5: Human individual system 179
Figure 3.6: Workplace system 180
Figure 3.7: Personality system 181
Figure 3.8: Job system 181
Figure 3.9: DISC work behavioural style system 182
Figure 3.10: Human job requirements system 182
Figure 3.11: Logic of reasoning 183
Figure 3.12: Logical sequence of research design 184
Figure 3.13: Example of a DISC profile 214
Figure 4.1: Focus of the data analysis process 242
Figure 4.2: Synopsis of the layout structure of Chapter 4 243
Figure 4.3: Uncovering the characteristics of e-learning practitioners from the international domain 246
Figure 4.4: Personal Profile Analysis of the e-learning practitioner at TUT 251
Figure 4.5: Profile of highest style combination patterns of the TUT e-learning practitioner group 258

Figure 4.6: DISC factor distribution of star performer group 262
Figure 4.7: Personal profile pattern distribution of the star performer group 263
Figure 4.8: Personal profile structure distribution of the star performer group 264
Figure 4.9: Profile of style combination patterns of star performers 264
Figure 4.10: Profile of “HIGH” factors in the combination patterns of star performer group 265
Figure 4.11: Profile of “LOW” factors in combination patterns of star performer group 265
Figure 4.12: Personal Profile Analysis of the Partners in the Partners@Work Programme at TUT 290
Figure 4.13: Personal profile pattern distribution of the Partner group 298
Figure 4.14: Personal profile structure distribution of the Partner group 299
Figure 4.15: Profile of highest style combination patterns of the Partner group 299
Figure 4.16: Profile of “HIGH” factors in the combination patterns of the Partner group 300
Figure 4.17: Profile of “LOW” factors in the combination patterns of the Partner group 300
Figure 4.18: DISC distribution of the total population of e-learning practitioners at TUT 310
Figure 4.19: Comparison of the DISC factor distribution in the different groups 311
Figure 4.20: Personal profile pattern distribution of TUT 312
Figure 4.21: Comparison of the profile pattern distribution in the different groups 312
Figure 4.22: Personal profile structure distribution of total population at TUT 314
Figure 4.23: Comparison of the profile structure distribution in the different groups 315
Figure 4.24: Comparison of clusters of style combinations in the different groups 316
Figure 4.25: Job analysis process - international domain 325
Figure 4.26: HJA for structured environment 328
Figure 4.27: HJA for unstructured environment 329
Figure 4.28: Job analysis process for the position of the e-learning practitioner at TUT 331
Figure 4.29: HJA as perceived by the ECG 338
Figure 4.30: HJA for e-learning practitioner at TUT 340
Figure 4.31: Actual benchmark for TUT 346
Figure 4.32: HJA as perceived by practitioners at TUT 349
Figure 4.33: HJA as perceived by Partners 350
Figure 4.34: Job analysis process for the position of the e-learning practitioner in P@W Programme 355
Figure 4.35: Proposed HJA for a structured environment 360
Figure 4.36: Proposed HJA for a structured environment 374
Figure 4.37: Graphical presentation of the e-learning practitioner and -practice subsystems 379
Figure 4.38: P-J fit of the different groups and the international e-learning domain 383
Figure 4.39: DISC factor distribution for TUT population vs. HJA (CDS/I 397
Figure 4.40: DISC factor distribution for e-learning group at TUT vs. HJA (CDS/I) 399
Figure 4.41: DISC factor distribution for star performers vs. HJA (CDS/I) 404
Figure 4.42: DISC factor distribution for Partners at TUT vs. HJA (CDS/I) 406
Figure 4.43: P-J fit of the e-learning practitioner and requirements from the TUT domain 410
Figure 4.44: DISC factor distribution for TUT population vs. HJA (DI/CS) 411
Figure 4.45: DISC factor distribution for groups at TUT vs. HJA (DI/CS 414
Figure 4.46: DISC factor distribution for star performers at TUT vs. HJA (DI/CS) 417
Figure 4.47: DISC factor distribution for Partners at TUT vs. HJA (DI/CS) 420
Figure 4.48: P-J fit of the e-learning practitioner and P@W domain 424
Figure 4.49: DISC factor distribution for TUT population vs. HJA (SCD/I) 425

Figure 4.50: DISC factor distribution for groups at TUT vs. HJA (SCD/I) 428
Figure 4.51: DISC factor distribution for star performers at TUT vs. HJA (SCD/I) 431
Figure 4.52: DISC factor distribution for Partners vs. HJA (SCD/I) 434
Figure 4.53: P-J fit of the e-learning practitioner and the theoretical domain 437
Figure 4.54: DISC factor distribution for TUT population vs. HJA (DIC/S) 438
Figure 4.55: DISC factor distribution for groups at TUT vs. HJA (DIC/S) 441
Figure 4.56: DISC factor distribution for star performers at TUT vs. HJA (DIC/S) 443
Figure 4.57: DISC factor distribution for Partners at TUT vs. HJA (DIC/S) 446
Figure 4.58: Acceptable job compatibility scores 450
Figure 4.59: Job compatibility scores for the different groups: HJA CD/SI 453
Figure 4.60: Job compatibility scores for the different groups: HJA CDS/I 455
Figure 4.61: Acceptable job compatibility scores for the different groups: HJA DI/CS 456
Figure 4.62: Job compatibility scores for the different groups: HJA SCD/I 457
Figure 4.63: Acceptable job compatibility scores for the different groups: HJA DIC/S 459
Figure 4.64: Classifying scheme for e-Learning practitioner construct 479
Figure 5.1: Synoptic presentation of the layout structure of Chapter 5 480
Figure 5.2: Diagram of the classification scheme for the e-learning practitioner construct 495
Figure 5.3: A dynamic interactionist model of the e-learning practitioner system 510