
Chapter 4: Curative Factors

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4 Curative Factors

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, the research methodology and research process followed in this study were explained. In this chapter, the first category identified during the data analysis and coding process, namely *Curative Factors*, is presented. Findings include quotations obtained from the transcripts of focus group interviews and the printouts of synchronous conversations on *Yahoo! Messenger*, as well as e-mail text messages that students sent to each other and the lecturer during the time that the module was active.

4.2 Relation between curative factors and online learning

Curative Factors was the first category of data that was formed during the process of coding and analysing data. I decided to borrow the word *curative* from the nursing / medical field as it represents the process of healing. At the beginning phase of the module the participants were affectively not well, but a 'process of healing' started, and with time they became well. Anderson and Anderson (1994:281) defines the concept 'cure' as:

2. *the favourable outcome of the treatment of a disease or other disorder.*
3. *a course of therapy, medication, a therapeutic measure or another remedy used in treatment of a medical problem ...'*

Stedman's Pocket Medical Dictionary (1987:176) defines the concept 'curative' as:

'Tending to heal or cure'.

According to the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002:413), 'factor' is defined as '*A circumstance, fact or influence that contributes to a result*', while the Collier's Dictionary (1977:366) defines 'factor' as '*One of several elements that bring about a result or contribute to the formation of a thing or circumstance*'.

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Considering these definitions, *Curative Factors* with regard to this study implied factors that contributed to the staying power and the motivation of students to complete the module. The meaning of *Curative Factors* can be explained metaphorically by linking them to a person's health. These are factors that prevented (cured) students from quitting the module (disease or illness), and assisted them in coping with the academic and emotional strain (maintaining health).

Three clusters of themes were put together to form the first category of meaning, namely *Curative Factors*. These clusters were *altruism versus individualism*, *communication*, and *internal drive or value system*. The themes of the three clusters, as discussed in this chapter (the themes form the headings of the subsections), are indicated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Themes as discussed in Chapter 4

Category 1	Clusters	Themes
Curative factors	1. Altruism versus individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Fear of failing or disappointing tribe members ☒ Selfish behaviour versus assistance to group members ☒ Feeling guilty about selfish behaviour ☒ Group identification ☒ Emotional and cognitive support ☒ Risk-taking behaviour
	2. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Feeling of loneliness ☒ Asynchronous versus synchronous communication ☒ Expressing finding it difficult to cope ☒ Language ☒ Sharing positive and negative emotions
	3. Internal drive (marks, volition) and value system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☒ Negative emotions such as feeling agitated (frustration) ☒ Feeling threatened and exposed ☒ Self-image and image ☒ Positive descriptions of experiences ☒ Feedback from the lecturer ☒ Negative experience of module not being a game

Under each theme indicated in the right-hand column of Table 4.1, quotes will be provided that will indicate the experiences of the participants as they pertain to the specific theme and the corresponding cluster (presented in the middle column of the table).

4.3 Altruism versus individualism

To promote understanding of the concepts '*altruism*' and '*individualism*', definitions of the concepts, criteria indicating a statement as either altruistic or individualistic, as well as criteria for including such a statement in or excluding it from the cluster are

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provided in Table 4.2. These definitions and criteria denoting *'altruism'* or *'individualism'* indicated whether the statement should be included in or excluded from the cluster. Definitions, criteria, and inclusion or exclusion criteria denoting altruism are found in the second column of Table 4.2, while the definitions of and criteria for individualism, as well as the criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from the cluster, are explained in the right-hand column of Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Denoting altruism or individualism

	Altruism	Individualism
Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ 'Behavior carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources' (Rushton 1980: 7). ☉ A philosophy 'that promotes the survival chances of other at a cost to one's own' (Altruists International [Sa]). ☉ 'Unselfish concern or devotion to the welfare of others' (Collier's Dictionary 1977: 28). ☉ 'Selfless concern for the well being of others' (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002: 32). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ 'Only the individual is of interest ... the quintessential ego of one's ego' (Lukes 1973: 67,68). ☉ Individualism '...holds that every person is an end in himself and that no person should be sacrificed for the sake of another' (Stata 1992). ☉ 'Theory and practice that emphasizes the worth, freedom, and well being of the individual against the authority of a group, community or state' (Collier's Dictionary 1977: 524). ☉ 'Independence and self-reliance. Self-centred feeling or conduct; egoism' (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002: 587).
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ When indicated that learners were afraid to disappoint team members. ☉ If they helped and supported team members. ☉ Where communication took place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ If students verbalised that they wanted to help themselves first, and then others. ☉ If students broke the rules set by the facilitator to secure their personal success.
Inclusion in cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ When concern for peers was illustrated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ When students verbalised the desire to win, or to achieve good marks.
Exclusion from cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ When indicated that support was sought, but not given. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ If indicated that s/he was too busy coping to be involved in the group. ☉ When an inability to work in a team was identified.

Quotations from focus group transcripts and e-messages denoting the different themes of the cluster, as they were identified during the coding process, are organised and presented under the following headings:

- ☉ Fear of failing or disappointing tribe members;
- ☉ Selfish behaviour versus assistance to group members;
- ☉ Feeling guilty about selfish behaviour;
- ☉ Group identification;
- ☉ Emotional and cognitive support; and
- ☉ Risk-taking behaviour.

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These themes indicated either altruistic or individualistic behaviour; and the behaviour of the participants was the result of feelings experienced, such as fear, trust, distrust, safety, insecurity, joy, and stress.

4.3.1 Fear of failing and disappointing tribe members

Participants were afraid of failing the module and disappointing their peers. Some of them felt incompetent and said that they did not know enough to participate in the tribes. Participants expressed a fear of letting their tribal members down and being responsible for the failure of the tribe. One participant made a specific statement to this effect. She tried to rationalise the fear of letting team members down by saying that it was probably evoked by high personal expectations. She said:

Quote FG 4.1:

'Ek dink dit is 'n kwessie van, dat jy, jy weet, ek stel altyd die balkie te hoog vir myself. Ek is bang ek drop die ander ouens, jy weet, en dan maak hulle dit nie.'

[Translation]

'I think it was a matter of, that one, you know, always set the bar (hurdle) too high for oneself; I was afraid of letting the other guys down, you know, and then they won't make it.'

One of the participants, Marietjie, avoided group interaction altogether. She indicated that she did not partake in the group assignments, and only completed the individual assignments to accumulate sufficient grades. The interpretation was that she did not trust the ability of team members and/or felt incompetent to such an extent that she considered working alone as the only option. This participant said:

Quote FG 4.2:

'No, I isolated myself from the group things and just carried on with the individual things, and made sure that I get enough marks for the individual ones.'

As opposed to the individualistic behaviour of Marietjie, another participant felt so strong about not letting the group down that he concentrated on collaborative assignments only. He said:

Quote FG 4.3:

'I did the exact opposite that Marietjie did. I don't like competing either, but I used more time on the group thing, because I didn't want to let the group down. So, eventually, I didn't have time to do the individual things, because I was now so trying to get the group, you know, trying to do my part for the group thing. And the only reason I did that, was because I didn't get any rope at all. If it weren't a competition, and only working in groups together, then it's the same thing that you

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say now. The group. I wanted to do my share, and eventually I failed, because my computer crashed, and I voted myself out.'

These two cases showed that people could have diverse experiences in similar situations. While the remark of the last participant reflected altruism due to feelings of fear of failing and letting the group down, Marietjie only expressed the desire to achieve sufficient marks. Therefore, her remarks reflected individualism and possibly incompetence or fear of failing. The last participant, however, clearly put the interest of the tribe above individual achievements.

Thus, the behaviour of some of the participants reflected altruism. However, the analysis also revealed individualistic behaviour by some participants who were looking after their own interests first. Voting off did not imply being voted off the module or the course, but only off the group into which participants were divided.

4.3.2 Selfish behaviour versus assistance to group members

Participants who said that they had to help themselves before they could offer assistance to others who needed help exhibited individualistic behaviour. Some of the participants stated that it was at first everyone for him- or herself. One participant indicated that she could not help someone who was struggling, even if she wanted to, as she was '*busy keeping her own head above water*'. When she received e-mail from a person who requested help, she felt that that person could wait two or three days until she had things figured out, and only then would she assist. She explained her position as follows:

Quote FG 4.4:

'... En ek wil nou eerlik wees, op daardie stadium, selfs al wou ek iemand help, kon ek nie, want ek was besig om net vir myself kop bo water te hou. En ek dink dis nogal waar – die ding was so intens, dat, dit was daardie eerste ruk elkeen vir homself. Jy kon nie...iemand stuur 'n e-mail na Elearn toe en sê: ek kan nie dit doen nie, help my asseblief. Twee, drie dae daarna, as ek myne uitgefigure het, dan sal ek reply en sê hoor hierso, dit en dit en dit.'

[Translation]

'... Now honestly, at that stage, even if I wanted to help someone, I couldn't, because I was too busy keeping my head above water. And I think it is rather true – the thing was so intense that, it was at first everybody for himself. You couldn't ... someone sent e-mail to eLearn, saying, I'm struggling, please help. Two, three days later, once I've figured mine out, then I will reply and say, listen, do this and this and this.'

Two other participants stated that they had to figure out things for themselves before they could assist others. They said:

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Quote FG 4.5:

'...en sodra ek gemaklik was met die ding, dan kon ek begin om ander mense te help.'

[Translation]

'...and once I was at ease with it, then I could start helping others.'

Quote FG 4.6:

'Maar tot op daardie stadium, ek dink dit was elke week, was daar twee of drie dae van chaos wat ek nie vir iemand kon help nie.'

[Translation]

'But, up to that stage, I think it was every week, there were two or three days of chaos that I couldn't help anybody.'

However, the individualistic behaviour of participants had an altruistic undertone. This became evident when participants stated that they regretted being selfish when they were requested to become involved.

4.3.3 Feeling guilty about selfish behaviour

Hank sent e-mail to his tribe explaining that he could not be the leader of the tribe, as he was not even able to find the assignments that they had to do. Hank, as well as other participants, used the word 'sorry' to explain feelings about behaviour. Hank wrote:

Quote TM 4.1:

*Joanita ek sou graag wou lei maar as ek nie eers op die assignments kan kom nie sal dit nie juis werk nie. **Jammer** om almal teleur te stel.
Beulah, Thanks for the motto, it is the only thing that is keeping me sane and going. Lets give real meaning to it.
E-Go We-Go All-Go, even if it is Slo-go!
Hank*

[Translation]

*Joanita, I would gladly lead, but as I can't even find the assignments, it will not really work. **Sorry** to disappoint you all.
Beulah, Thanks for the motto, it is the only thing that is keeping me sane and going. Lets give real meaning to it.
E-Go We-Go All-Go, even if it is Slo-go!
Hank*

[Own emphasis]

Some participants expressed regret at not being able to help their peers. They indicated that deadlines arrived before they were in any position to assist a group member. The following quotations are evidence of this feeling of regret.

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Quote FG 4.7:

'Ek's baie jammer. Ek het net my eie bas probeer red, en dan daarna, kan jy iemand anders probeer help, maar dan is dit baie keer te laat vir daardie persoon.'

[Translation]

'I'm really sorry. I only tried to save my own skin, and then, after that, you could try to help somebody else, but then it was often too late for that person.'

[Own emphasis]

Quote FG 4.8:

'Of dit is so laat in die week, verstaan, of dit is so laat in die week, dat daardie persoon nie kan die goeters klaarmaak in tyd van die afsnydatum Sondagand twaalfuur nie.'

[Translation]

'Or it is late in the week, you know, or it is so late in the week that that person cannot finish the stuff in time for the cut-off date on Sunday midnight.'

The feeling of regret experienced by participants probably related to a feeling of group identification that developed through the course of events.

4.3.4 Group identification

Being part of a group or being recognised as part of a group seemed to be an element of the module that was enjoyed by participants. The mere fact that a participant realised that s/he was not the only person working hard, or struggling, strengthened the feeling of belonging to a group. The fact that they realised that they were experiencing the same hardships made them feel closer to one another. One participant said that it was wonderful to receive a message in the middle of the night when she was at wits' end. She stated:

Quote FG 4.9:

'... was dit die lekkerste gevoel om halfeen die nag te sit met jou hande in jou hare, en woep, hier kom 'n boodskap op: Ag, ek is bly om te sien jy's ook op. Waarmee is jy besig? Ek sukkel met hierdie ding. Ek kan dit nie doen nie. Help my. Nee, maar probeer dit, probeer dit. So die spanwerk met die synchronous kommunikasie het vertienvoudig ...'

[Translation]

'... it was the most wonderful feeling to be at wits' end at half past twelve in the night, and wham, a message appears: Oh, I am so glad to see you are also up. What are you busy doing? I'm struggling with this thing. I can't do it. Please help. No, but try this, try that. So, teamwork increased tenfold with synchronous communication...'

One participant said that the link with peers made her continue trying to solve problems that she experienced. She said:

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Quote FG 4.10:

'Vir my was dit wat my laat aanhou werk het, en aanhou probeer het, en aanhou karring het aan hierdie goed wat ek nie altyd regkry nie. Want die feit dat, dit was nie net 'n rekenaar nie. Dit was nie net 'n skerm en 'n keyboard nie, en ek het 'n probleem nie. Daar was ander ouens wat saam met my in die game was. Daar was ouens wat saam met my gesuffer het, so die feit dat daar 'n gesig agter die skerm was, ...'

[Translation]

'For me, that made me keep working, and keep trying, and keep working on this stuff that I couldn't always manage. 'Cause the fact was, it was not just a screen, and just a keyboard, and I having a problem. There were other guys with me in the game. We suffered together, so the fact that there was a face behind the screen, ...'

A participant echoed the 'positive' feeling of not needing to struggle alone. During the focus group interview, this participant said that she missed the interaction that they had in the middle of the night.

Quote FG 4.11:

'... dit was regtig – ekskuus vir die Engelse woord – exciting om eenuur in die oggend op die Net te gaan, en jy sien met Yahoo! Messenger, o, daardie ou is ook online ... Ek mis dit...'

[Translation]

'... it really was – pardon the English word - exciting to access the Net at one o'clock in the morning, and you see with Yahoo! Messenger, oh, that person is online too! ... I miss that...'

While it could be argued that the computer and the Internet were mere objects, the abovementioned participant saw a face of a peer behind the screen of her computer. 'Seeing' each other as individuals and as members of a group, without actually seeing each other, led participants to support one another. Although being linked invisibly in cyberspace, participants indicated that they experienced support on both emotional and cognitive levels. This may be described as an altruistic factor.

4.3.5 Emotional and cognitive support

One participant indicated that he received moral as well as cognitive support from tribe members. He simply said:

Quote FG 4.12:

'And support from your tribe members as well. That was... I think moral support as well as cognitive support sometimes.'

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The following e-mail was sent by Gérard who did not know to which tribe he had been assigned. Bernice replied and made him feel welcome by making a joke. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.2:

*Hi Friends
HELP, I do not know which tribe I am in. Will anybody take me in?
Any help?
Good luck
Gérard*

Quote EM 4.3:

*Hallo
You are in group 4 with virtual eve – will however have to undergo a sexchange
[sic] before joining the group as it exists of ladies only!
Good luck!
Bernice*

Support was sometimes offered. The following e-mail message indicated how Bob offered to help three of his peers who did not contribute to the website of the tribe. Although Bob's offer to help was linked to his responsibility to keep the tribe's website up to date, he also realised that three of his group members probably needed help.

Quote EM 4.4:

*Hi B, J and Tiny,
I did not receive anything from you for the tribal web page, or your personal assignments. The deadline is now past, but please let me know if you need any help.
Bob*

Support was also provided in the form of congratulations. The following e-mail was sent by Barbara to the lecturer, but for the eyes of all participants/tribe members who were successful in completing the assignment. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.5:

*Hi Linda
Kindly receive tribe 5 URL¹⁸ <http://tribe-5never-die.20m.com>
Regards
Barbara*

Barbara was congratulated by a number of her peers. Camilla sent the following e-mail:

Quote EM 4.6:

*Congratulations Tribe 5! You did a great job.
Camilla*

¹⁸ URL = uniform resource locator (web address)

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Hendrik congratulated Barbara as follows:

Quote EM 4.7:

*Is the site still under construction? The URL do [sic] not go to a tribal site, but to 20m.com sign-up/site creating tool.
I like tribe 5's name - "tribe-5never-die" - very creative: Barbara WELL DONE!!
Hendrik*

Gérard congratulated Barbara as well. He wrote:

Quote EM 4.8:

*CONGRATULATIONS BARBARA!!
Looks good!
Gérard*

Support was not only evident when congratulations were given on performances, but also when personal messages were sent. Joanita supported Bob who started a new job. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.9:

*Bob,
Is it not your first day in the new job tomorrow?
If it is, good luck!
Joanita*

Support was also provided in cognitive matters. Bob and Gérard communicated via e-mail about something that Bob did on their website. Bob provided the information by replying to Gérard's e-mail message. The e-message, including the reply, is presented.

Quote EM 4.10:

*Hi Bob
I see you have changed your island picture on the hagar-site [sic]. How did you do it?
I feel a bit dof [dense]!
Gérard*

Quote EM 4.11:

*Gérard, in your directory on Hagar there is a subdirectory called images. In this there is a file called shelter.gif. Just replace it with the file you want... also called shelter.gif.
Cheers,
Bob*

In this supportive environment, Rachel felt safe to such an extent that she requested assistance with regard to a problem that she experienced. She sent the following e-mail to Bob:

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Quote EM 4.12:

*Hi Bob,
I need help with my website on [http://hagar.up.ac.za/catts/learner/students/2002
\[name of participant\]/oro/index.htm](http://hagar.up.ac.za/catts/learner/students/2002/[name of participant]/oro/index.htm)
I don't know how to connect the pages to the index.html, which is the first "home"
page.
Can you help?
Thanks in advance
Rachel*

Participants exhibited other kinds of behaviour as well. Some participants took risks. For different reasons, they broke the rule on communication and/or the rules of the game. Some of these reasons relate to either altruistic or individualistic behaviour.

4.3.6 Risk-taking behaviour

There was no doubt that participants exhibited risk-taking behaviour by breaking the rules of the game and, especially, the ruling on communication. One participant simply stated:

Quote FG 4.13:

'Ons het die reëls verbreek.'

[Translation]

'We broke the rules.'

A number of the participants acknowledged that they had interpersonal contact with tribe members by phoning them about matters pertaining to the module. During these conversations, support was either given or asked. Participants knew that they were breaking the rule on communication. One of the participants said that she phoned people sometimes, even though it was 'illegal'. She said:

Quote FG 4.14:

'Well, I sometimes phoned people. Even if it was against the rules.'

Another participant confirmed that he had phoned more than one tribe member in order to receive 'final clarity' on a project.

Quote FG 4.15:

'When the whole thing didn't work so, to get final clarity, I sometimes phoned Sanet and Pedro and so.'

Although it could be expected that participants would adhere to the ruling on communication, as well as the general rules of the *CyberSurviver* game (at least

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during its first stages), the opposite seemed to be true. One participant was eager to inform the focus group interviewer about the time aspect of the 'offence'. She said:

Quote FG 4.16:

'Can I say when I phoned? I phoned, I used the telephone right at the beginning, before we had Messenger.' [*The Internet chatroom Yahoo! Messenger]

Breaking the 'only online' communication rule was done openly. Bob and Mindy had the following conversation via e-mail: Mindy requested help; Bob made suggestions on what should be done, and then invited her to phone. Their conversation follows:

Quote EM 4.13:

Hi Bob

This blond definately need [sic] some assistance [sic] with this week's assignment:

- 1. How do I change the picture of the shelter?*
- 2. How do I FTP my site to the Hagar site - I can get into my folder, but then I don't know what to do next. Hope you can help!*

Groetnis [Greetings]

Mindy

Quote EM 4.14:

Hi Mindy,

Sorry I am only replying now, but I have of course been at work. If your [sic] want to save your current site on Hagar, I would go about it as follows:

- 1. Open your current site in Internet Explorer.*
- 2. Save it using the save as function under the files menu. Choose to save all the page content including images.*
- 3. FTP these files to Hagar. I'm not sure (since I don't use MSWindows at all), but I think that if your have Internet explorer 6.0, its pretty much like a copy and paste exercise. Using Internet Explorer, go to ftp://hagar.up.ac.za/students. Find your home directory, find the ORO sub directory and paste your files in this directory. Make sure your index file is called index.htm and not index.html. If you are not using Internet Explorer, or can't get it to work, try a shareware FTP program like Cute FTP.*
- 4. A second option is not to move your site at all. There may be problems in any case with embedded objects like banner ads etc. You can just create a link from your home page on Hagar to your current site. I think the idea is that you learn to FTP though!*

Please phone me if needs be on 082 if you get desparate! [sic]

Bob

However, disobeying the 'only online' communication rule was not limited to personal contact by means of a telephone or cellphone. Gérard probably gave himself away when he indicated to the lecturer that he had 'spoken' to Sanet. He sent e-mail to the lecturer saying:

Quote EM 4.15:

Hi Linda

When I spoke to Sanet over the weekend, she said we only had to find information on free stuff on the Web ...

Gérard

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Whether he spoke to Sanet face-to-face, or whether they communicated by means of the phone or e-mail, was not known. This was, however, interesting, because if they did meet face-to-face, they both would have broken the 'only online' communication rule. If they did communicate by e-mail, the use of the word 'spoke' could indicate that online communication was sometimes seen as personal communication.

Since the lecturer and the researcher (and all the participants) had access to all the e-mail sent, it was rather surprising that the rule on communication was openly disobeyed. However, an external factor could have contributed to this state of affairs. As the participants were still receiving education and training on databases once a week at the time of launching the *CyberSurfiver* game, they had the opportunity to meet face-to-face in a formal class situation. During these sessions, they were forced together in the same physical space, which created the ideal environment in which some of the rules of the game could be broken. A participant made the following remark with regard to this aspect of the course:

Quote FG 4.17:

'Can I just say something that didn't come out last time [during the first interview]? When we started this course, we actually had two courses together. Am I right? We came together on Thursday evenings for [lecturer's] databases, and then, after about three or four weeks, they said that we are going to stop this because there is so much work in the Surfiver module.'

It should also be noted that the participants knew one another before they started the *CyberSurfiver* module. They became acquainted earlier when they did a few modules of the master's degree course in computer-assisted education. This could have influenced their behaviour in not keeping their promise to obey the ruling on communication. It could be assumed that bonds of friendship were created while they studied and struggled together. As one participant put it, they already went '*through deep waters*' by that time. The following two quotations substantiate this assumption:

Quote FG 4.18:

'Yes. We went through deep waters before this already. But we weren't friends specifically, I think, like we – I didn't know Pedro and Bettie, for instance, and Sanet and so on. And Gérard as well. And in this time, we kind of re-separated [sic], and we got to know each other there.'

Quote FG 4.19:

'You know what the thing was also that I'm thinking of now, in class, we were friends before we did this. You must remember, this was our third module, so by that time, we knew each other.'

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It was, therefore, not a total surprise to learn that participants were breaking the rule on communication by visiting each other at home on individual or private occasions. One participant said:

Quote FG 4.20:

'We visited each other. Well, the first four lessons when we – the first four weeks when we came here on Thursday evenings, we spoke. People visited each other. That's it.'

Another participant commented that his wife probably thought that he was cheating on her, as Sanet came to his house for assistance and support. He said:

Quote FG 4.21:

'... I think my wife thought Sanet was my "skelm" [mistress].'

From the above quotations, it was clear that the participants disobeyed the communication rule not only by phoning each other but also by having face-to-face contact. They spoke to each other, visited their friends, and met for assistance and support.

Participants were aware that all e-messages could be accessed by all participants as well as the lecturer and researcher. The lecturer, who probably suspected that participants met face-to-face and who noticed the offer of telephonic assistance between Bob and Mindy, sent the following reminder:

Quote EM 4.16:

*Remember that strictly speaking no discussions about the online part of this module is allowed in [name of the lecturer] contact sessions ;-) I assume therefore that you are going to discuss your technical difficulties online...
In the ideal world - just a few tips!*

Note that the lecturer did not sign her name at the end of the e-mail message. This may be an indication that she wanted to emphasise the seriousness of the rule that she made. She was exercising her authority and probably wanted her message to sound like a warning, *i.e.* less friendly and strict. Regardless of the lecturer's reminder on the ruling about communication, participants went ahead and broke the rule anyway. Participants acknowledged the 'illegality' of their actions, and it seemed that some of them felt guilty about breaking the rules. One participant even suggested that a third focus group session should be held so that more information on the illegality of their communicative actions could become known. She said:

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Quote FG 4.22:

'That was very illegal...you know that. Now is the first time that I've said it, but... So there should be another session, because then even more would come out.'

Participants gave different reasons for breaking the rules of the game, including the only-online communication rule. These reasons could be related to the need to communicate feelings of incompetence and stress, the need for immediate feedback and support, and the need to give support (an altruistic feature).

The need for immediate feedback was expressed by the participant who acknowledged that she had broken the rule on communication early in the game. She phoned a group member even before the game was well on its way, because she had the need to feel that she was coping. Quote FG 4.16 should be read in conjunction with Quote FG 4.23. She said:

Quote FG 4.23:

'Because with Messenger I could type: "Hello Sanet, hoe gaan dit met jou?" ["How are you?"] And she'd say: "Dit gaan goed, maar ek sukkel hiermee." ["I am well, but I find this difficult."] So, that circle of communication to me is very important. I can't send an e-mail to her and tomorrow get a reply and I can't remember what it's about.'

The need for immediate feedback and support was also expressed by another participant who emphasised that he could not afford to wait for e-mail to arrive.

Quote FG 4.24:

'What's bad about that is that you would get thirty e-mails every evening. That's bad. And you don't know which ones to read and which ones to ignore. Some people will just say: "Ag nee, dit gaan sleg!" ["Oh, no! It's not going well."] And someone else will say: "Ja, met my ook!" ["Yes, me too"], and you'll get all this [sic] e-mails. And you also didn't have an evening to wait. I had to do my stuff, like Michelle said, if I don't do this tonight, I would sleep two hours less tomorrow. So, instead of waiting for Sanet to e-mail, or Pedro to e-mail, I would phone them. Yes. And say listen, I'm struggling with this. Help me quickly. Get on with the task.'

Probably because they did feel guilty, participants attempted to rationalise their communication behaviour. One participant felt that they did not often disobey the rules, but admitted that it could have happened twenty per cent of the time. He also acknowledged that they made personal contact to discuss problems, but explained that contact was aimed at supporting each other. He said:

Quote FG 4.25:

'Not extensively. I wouldn't say so extensively. I want to say, what I saw is – well, I don't know what everybody did in the dark, but what I know with my knowledge is that the breaking of the rules is maybe twenty per cent of the time. Not we break the rules all the time, we chat all the time on the telephone or whatever. It's just

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sometimes if you had a problem. I just want to say, a lot of the talking if we did talk, was more in a supportive way than in a technical, academic –'

From this comment it was clear that participants broke the rule because they wanted to support one another emotionally. This could be regarded as an altruistic feature of communication.

Breaking the communication rule was not the only rebellious or risk-taking activity that was displayed. Further risk-taking behaviour was exhibited by not voting tribe members out during the final stages of the game.

A participant said:

Quote FG 4.26:

'Ek wou gesê het van wat Hendrik nou gesê het. O, nee! Wat ek wou sê van die reëls verbreek, is dit: in die laaste pylvak, het niemand gestem nie.'

[Translation]

'I wanted to say what Hendrik just said. Oh, no! What I wanted to say about the breaking of the rules was: on the home straight, nobody voted.'

One participant voted himself out of the game. He said:

Quote FG 4.27:

'Maar ek het myself uitgestem, weet ek, want ek het my computer gecrash. Ek het vir Linda ge-e-mail.'

[Translation]

'But I voted myself out, I knew that, because my computer crashed. I e-mailed Linda.'

These actions probably were a sign of altruistic behaviour. By that time, group members had shown that they cared about the other members of the tribe. By not voting tribe members out, they were showing that they had the interests of the tribe at heart. Interestingly enough, although the actions of the majority of the participants suggested an undertone of altruism, two of the participants had their own interests at heart. One participant and a friend from his original tribe did not want to cooperate with 'weaker' tribe members, as they had the desire to do well. This participant communicated with the lecturer, also on behalf of his friend, and informed her that they were forming their own tribe, regardless of the fact that they were breaking the rules of the game. He said:

Quote FG 4.28:

'Ek het vir haar [die dosent] gesê ek gaan dit [die reëls] breek, en ek het nie geworry daarvoor nie. Ek het vir haar gesê, ongeag van wat jy sê, dis wat ek gaan doen, want ek wil my waarde vir my geld kry uit hierdie survivorstorie uit, en ek

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gaan nie in 'n groep sit waar ek die enigste een is wat alles moet doen, en al die ander mense dra in die proses nie, want dit gaan ook oor punte aan die einde. Dit was aan die einde van die dag 'n spel gewees, en ek dink baie van die reëls was gemaak om te breek. Ek het byvoorbeeld, as ons 'n opdrag gekry het, het ek gekyk in hoe 'n mate ek my kinders daarby kon betrek het, wat waarskynlik meer tyd en kennis as ek het.'

[Translation]

'I told her [the lecturer] that I was going to break them [the rules], and I didn't care. I told her, regardless of what you say, this is what I'm going to do, because I want value for my money from this survivor story, and I'm not going to be part of a group where I'm the only one who has to do everything, and carry all the other people in the process, because in the end it's about marks as well. At the end of the day, it was a game, and I think many of the rules were made to be broken. For example, when we received an assignment, I tried to see to what extent I could involve my children who probably knew more than I did and who had more time on their hands.'

During the same interview, the participant repeated that he did not want to be part of a group where he had to do all the work. He again indicated that they (his colleague and he) felt so strongly about it that they formed their own tribe. The fact that he was adamant is reflected in the following quotation:

Quote FG 4.29:

'...het ons besluit, ek het besluit ek gaan nie deel van daai groep word nie, en ek het vir Linda ge-e-mail en gesê dit is my redes, en ek gaan, ons gaan ons eie groep vorm. So, daai groep was gestig, toe vorm ons 'n aparte groep, want ons wou nie deel van daai groep word nie.'

[Translation]

'... we have decided, I decided I was not going to be part of that group, and I e-mailed Linda and told her these were my reasons, and I was going to, we were going to form our own group. So, that group was formed; then we formed a separate group, because we didn't want to become part of that group.'

With regard to the formation of the new tribe, the following e-mail was sent from Joanita to her 'partner in crime':

Quote EM 4.17:

*Ek sukkel net so om reaksie uit die lede van Groep 3 te kry.
Ek vote myself uit dat [sic] vorm ons die nuwe groep!!! Ons moet net iemand kry wat bietjie meer weet van webdesign anders het ons 'n probleempie. (Nie dat dit moeilik behoort te wees om iemand te kry wat meer kennis het as altwee van ons saam nie!!!)
Sterkte
Joanita*

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[Translation]

'It is every bit as difficult for me to get reaction from the members of Group 3. I vote myself out; then we form the new group!!!. We just have to find someone who knows a bit more than we do about web design; otherwise we have a small problem. (Not that it should be difficult to find someone who has more knowledge than the two of us together!!!)

Good luck

Joanita

To summarise, it seemed that most participants were motivated to stay in the game by the support that they received from tribe members. Group members would even break the rules of the game in order to show or give support. While most participants illustrated concern for their peers, some individuals were motivated by their desire to do well. None of the participants, whether motivated by altruistic or individualistic intentions, could achieve her/his goals by not communicating with the lecturer and tribe members. The extent, to which the rule on communication was broken, could be derived from the above quotations. One result of the breaking of the rule was that more communication methods were employed than prescribed by the *CyberSurviver* game format. The second cluster of themes, namely Communication, will be discussed next.

4.4 Communication

The cluster that follows on *Altruism versus Individualism* is the cluster called *Communication*. Definitions and criteria denoting the concept 'communication' are presented in Table 4.3. All that meets the criterion for communication as defined in the middle row of Table 4.3 will be discussed in this section. The criteria for including a statement in the cluster or for excluding it from the cluster are given in the last two rows of Table 4.3.

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Table 4.3: Denoting communication

Communication	
Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ 'A process whereby symbols generated by people are received and responded to by other people' (Samovar, Henman and King 1996). ☉ 'Involves the reciprocal process of sending and receiving messages between two or more people' (Smith 1992:4). ☉ 'Depends on having the equipment (both verbal and non-verbal) for social signalling' (Louw and Edwards 1993:749). ☉ 'Transfer of information, as facts, wishes, or emotions from a source to a receiver' (Collier's Dictionary 1977:203). ☉ 'The action of communicating. A letter or message containing information or news. Social contact. The means of sending or receiving information, such as telephone lines or computers' (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002:233).
Criteria	All types and means of communication used during the course of the module between participants, as well as participants and the facilitator of the module.
Inclusion in cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ Moral support. ☉ Information to assist in completion of assignments. ☉ Asking for support or information. ☉ Synchronous and asynchronous communication. ☉ All types of feedback from facilitator.
Exclusion from cluster	Communication that took place before commencement and after completion of the module.

The following themes were identified and clustered under the heading *Communication*:

- ☉ Feeling of loneliness;
- ☉ Asynchronous versus synchronous communication;
- ☉ Expressing finding it difficult to cope;
- ☉ Language; and
- ☉ Sharing positive and negative emotions.

During the first three weeks of the module, the participants accessed the Internet and the online *Yahoo! Group* at different times of the day and night due to their different schedules. They had to rely on e-mail sent via the *Yahoo! Group* for all communication with each other and the lecturer. During this period, participants experienced online communication as a lonely affair. They felt that they were on their own and had to 'figure out things' all by themselves.

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4.4.1 Feeling of loneliness

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were experienced by a number of participants. Within the context of the highs and the lows of the *CyberSurviver* module, one participant experienced this feeling of loneliness as a 'low'. He said:

Quote FG 4.30:

'Die lows was, ek dink veral op stadiums as jy dalk nou byvoorbeeld wat – ek meen, ons het ook maar verskillende tye wat ons op die Net geklim het, en ... uhm... as jy met jou lonesome self daar sit en jy probeer, probeer uitfigure wat daar aangaan, en jy't nie regtig die geselskap soos wat ons eventueel eintlik toe nou met Yahoo! Messenger begin kry het nie. Dit was lekker.'

[Translation]

'The lows were, I think especially at stages when you perhaps, for instance, what - I mean, we were on the Net at different times, and ... um... when you sit there with your lonesome self and try to figure out what is going on, and you do not really have the conversation which we eventually did have through Yahoo! Messenger. That was nice.'

The feeling of loneliness was experienced by a number of other participants as well. The first part of the module was experienced as a lonely affair by a participant who stated:

Quote FG 4.31:

'Wat vir my nogal die eerste helfte – as ek nou moet dink, dit was nogal alleen, want jy sit daarso en jy werk aan jou ding, en jy kan dit nie regkry nie, en jy stuur nou maar 'n e-mail na eLearn toe, en more-oggend miskien het een of twee mense reply, en dan kyk jy nou maar wat jy kan doen en so-aan.'

[Translation]

'For me, the first half kind of – if I have to think now, it was kind of lonely, because you sit there and work on your thing, and you're struggling, and yet you send e-mail to eLearn, and perhaps in the morning one or two guys have replied, and then you see what you can do, and so on.'

Loneliness was described by another participant as a cause of increased levels of uncertainty and anxiety. The participant said:

Quote FG 4.32:

'That will, I think it will increase your uncertainty, your anxiety. I think the main thing is you're alone.'

Feelings of loneliness, anxiety and uncertainty were experienced particularly late at night, and these feelings, according to one of the participants, adversely affected the participant's expectation of reaching the outcomes of assignments. Three participants made the following comments:

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Quote FG 4.33:

'Ja [Yes], isolation. The isolation is tremendous. Especially late at night.'

Quote FG 4.34:

'I was really isolated at home. I just had to get on with it.'

Quote FG 4.35:

'Jy voel vreeslik alleen terwyl jy daar sit, en solank jy die ding nie regkry nie, weet jy hoe ver is jy van regkry af – jy is nog steeds net nie daar nie.'

[Translation]

'You feel terribly lonely while you are sitting there, and as long as you are struggling, you know how far you are from finding a way to do it – you are still just not there.'

However, since the introduction of *Yahoo! Messenger* (a synchronous communication tool), participants felt less lonely. A participant explained that everyone experienced the communication situation as chaotic until *Yahoo! Messenger* was introduced. When that happened, they could communicate directly with one another, instead of sending e-mail and waiting for a reply. He said:

Quote FG 4.36:

'... aan die begin was dit absolute chaos vir almal gewees, en ek dink met Yahoo! Messenger wat toe nou begin inkom het, het die boodskappe op die message bord begin verminder, omdat ons so direk met mekaar kon begin kommunikeer. En dit was vir my ook baie, baie nice.'

[Translation]

'... in the beginning it was absolute chaos, for everybody, and I think when Yahoo! Messenger was introduced, the messages on the message board started to decrease, because we could start to communicate directly with each other. And that, for me, was also very, very nice.'

Some participants immediately made use of synchronous communication to request assistance, as they felt lost. Gérard was anxious to get information, while Sanet mentioned that she also was in the dark.

Quote EM 4.18:

*HELP!! I am lost! What exactly do we need for Thursday? ... Website? 600 word [sic] summary of what? HELP please!
Gérard*

Quote EM 4.19:

*Hi all
Linda, I'm in the dark too. I had problems connecting and stying [sic] connected with the Net- resulting in changing to a new service provider- ABSA. ...
Please help!
Sanet*

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Not only were participants lonely or lost, but they also considered the asynchronous manner of communication as problematic.

4.4.2 Asynchronous versus synchronous communication

Participants were of the opinion that e-mail was 'lifeless' communication, as they sometimes had to wait for a reply. This situation was especially troublesome when they had a problem, and requested assistance from their peers. They needed an immediate reply so that they could continue with their assignments, but had to wait. One of the participants said:

Quote FG 4.37:

'Want ek dink e-mail, om met e-mail te kommunikeer, is soort van 'n dooie kommunikasie. Jy weet, jy praat met die ou, en dan moet jy wag voordat daar 'n antwoord terugkom. Maar van die Messenger was dit lekker. Jy kon sê: Hoor hier, ek sukkel, ek's moeg, ek's gedaan! En dan kom die ander ou terug. Dis onmiddellike terugvoer en dan voel jy sommer beter.'

[Translation]

'Because I think e-mail, to communicate via e-mail, is sort of lifeless communication. You know, you talk to a person, and then you have to wait before you receive a reply. But since Messenger it was nice. You could say: Listen, I am struggling, I'm tired, I'm exhausted! And the other person replies. That is immediate feedback, and then you immediately feel better.'

Quote FG 4.38:

'Die ander frustrasie was gewees dat, ek was in 'n span gewees waar my spanmaat bedags online was, en ek snags online was. So daar was tussen ons geen kommunikasie nie.'

[Translation]

'The other frustration was that, I was in a team where my teammate was online during the day, and I was online during the evening. So there was no communication between us.'

It seemed that one participant broke the only-online communication rule specifically owing to other challenges brought about by asynchronous communication activities. When she did not receive e-mails from people who should have replied, she phoned and requested assistance so that she could proceed with the task. Refer to quote FG 4.24 on page 117.

While some participants experienced problems owing to the lack of response or the delays caused by asynchronous communication, one participant reacted to the large number of e-mails by deciding to open them selectively. He justified his decision as follows:

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Quote FG 4.39:

'I send you an e-mail. You get it tomorrow at work. You send me some back. I'll get it tomorrow night. What's bad about that is that you would get thirty e-mails every evening. That's bad. And you don't know which ones to read and which ones to ignore.'

Some of the participants also felt that they could not express themselves clearly by means of asynchronous communication, especially when emotions were involved. That emotions were involved was not questioned by the participants. The nature of the module (a competitive game) and their dependence on one another brought true feelings and character to the surface. One of the participants verbalised this fact as follows:

Quote FG 4.40:

'Wanneer jy kommunikeer en jy's afhanklik van mekaar, en daar's iets waarvoor jy werk, en daar's geld betrokke, dan, outomaties is al hierdie emosies betrokke.'

[Translation]

'When you communicate and you are dependent on each other, and there's something that you work for, and there's money involved, then all these emotions are automatically involved.'

Another participant felt that it was problematic to express emotions via e-mail; therefore, he preferred face-to-face contact to e-mail. This is clear from the following quotation:

Quote FG 4.41:

'I would say face-to-face communication, for me, was emotional, because now I can say: Joe, please help me. Ja, ek het ook dieselfde probleem [Yes, I have the same problem]. So we can, we can motivate each other. So face-to-face, for me, is emotion. How do you express emotion on an e-mail? [sic] You can use the face and all those type of things [emoticons], but here, I can go and cry on his shoulder or whatever.'

One complaint was that e-mail was too short, to the point, and very much like sending a text message or SMS¹⁹. The feeling was that it was easy to send e-mail if the receiver was unknown, but that you had to choose your words carefully. It was thought to be cognitively taxing to convey a message in such a manner that it would not be interpreted differently than intended. The participant who made this point said the following:

¹⁹ Text message or SMS (short message service) is a message in text form sent by means of a cellular phone

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Quote FG 4.42:

'With the SMS you just send the message, and you don't have to talk and talk and talk. You don't have to say: "Hallo, hoe gaan dit? Nee, dit gaan goed en met jou?" ["Hello, how are you? No, I'm fine, and how are you?"]. I think cognitively it's a very ... um ... taxing thing to do, because now you must really make sure that you are using your words and everything very economically. It's nice to do things like that when you don't know the person ...'

Another participant complained that e-mail was not a suitable medium when he wanted to 'moan and groan' or use abusive language; therefore, he felt that he could not express himself properly. He said:

Quote FG 4.43:

*'Also, you don't moan and groan and so *and^%\$ lekker [*and^%\$ so well] over an [sic] e-mail. Ja [yes], I cannot express myself over an e-mail. You know how to say it, but sometimes you just, you just need to go to somebody and just aflaa [offload]. ... It's not spontaneous, the e-mail.'*

Another participant shared this feeling, and described e-mail as 'very clinical'. He said:

Quote FG 4.44:

'Ja [Yes], the e-mail is very clinical. I can use fifty emoticons. I will still not express myself.'

The feeling of not being able to express oneself through asynchronous means was also experienced by a third participant who said that it was much better to express oneself verbally, which he did when he wanted to complain about something. He said that he felt much better afterwards.

Quote FG 4.45:

'It's true. I remember that I phoned Pedro once, and "ons het altwee vir mekaar vertel: kyk, nou stop ons hierdie ding. Ons is nou moeg hiervoor. En ons het."' [We both told each other: look; now we put a stop to this thing. We don't have to take this any longer. And we did]. Ja [Yes], and afterwards you felt much better.'

Communication via e-mail was problematic to yet another participant, but for different reasons. This person felt that e-mail did not provide privacy, while e-mail text messages were also open to misinterpretation. Although he felt that he could express himself emotionally by using phrases such as 'I am going to kill Gérard now/ I am so frustrated/ I am really sick', he did not want to make his feelings public. He did not want the rest of the tribe or the other participants to know how he felt. He also did not want to be misinterpreted. These are evident in the following quotation:

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Quote FG 4.46:

'But I think one of the most important things, for me, about communicating on the e-mail, is the exposure element. Because I can imagine talking quite emotionally. I'm not familiar with using word [sic]. It's not because I only have the words, it's the exposure thing. I'm gonna kill Gérard now. I am so frustrated. I am really sick, but I don't want to tell it to the whole group. I'm not even talking about the whole tribe. I'm talking about the big scene, you know. We look at things that are the same differently...than the things that we do. That's why, most of the time, we don't write things because we are afraid that this is...this is evident and so on.'

A second participant expressed the fear of being misinterpreted. She said:

Quote FG 4.47:

'The thing is here, it's basically misinterpreted, like I can write 'really' in big letters and in brackets, and someone will understand it, and then it will be offence-like ... But if I do it with my body language, then it won't be offending. So, there are all kinds of ways. Because of my body, you can look at the situation as if it is a positive situation and everything, where on my e-mail, it won't be the same.'

However, when *Yahoo! Messenger* (synchronous communication) was introduced, participants started to enjoy the online communication because they could communicate with individuals in a direct manner. They expressed the opinion that synchronous communication by means of *Yahoo! Messenger* did improve the team efforts of the tribes.

Quote FG 4.48:

'Maar van die Messenger was dit lekker. Jy kon sê: "Hoor hier, ek sukkel, ek's moeg, ek's gedaan!" en dan kom die ander ou terug. Dis onmiddellike terugvoer en dan voel jy sommer beter.'

[Translation]

'But with Messenger, it was nice. You could say: "Listen, I'm struggling, I'm tired, I'm exhausted", and the other person replies. This is immediate feedback, and then you immediately feel better.'

Another participant confirmed this advantage of synchronous communication:

Quote FG 4.49:

'Kind of a support from your colleagues that came in with the Messenger. Yahoo! Messenger.'

The introduction of the students to *Interwise*, an Internet tool for online conferencing that provided students with the opportunity to communicate synchronously, not only contributed to the group dynamic but also motivated students to further explore online communication. The fact that participants could hear each other changed their perception that online communication was 'lifeless'. While one participant described the *Interwise* session as one of the highlights of the module, another said that it contributed to the effectiveness of the other modes of online communication. One of

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the students, Maria, described the *Interwise* session as a positive experience, despite the technical problems that she had. The following quotations are relevant:

Quote FG 4.50:

'I can't help to say, where they had that Interwise meeting we also did one evening. That was one of the highlights for me.'

Quote FG 4.51:

'Ek weet nie of julle dit ook so beleef het nie, maar van die Interwise-sessie af, het – dit was so 'n sinchroniese ding wat ons eers nie kon gedoen het nie – was daar vir my absolute motivering wat uitgekóm het, en die hele groepdinamika. Dis hoe ek dit ervaar het, en ek dink die rede daarvoor sal wees, waar jy miskien by jou rekenaar sit en al daai goed, het hierdie ding skielik lewe gekry, en het jy jou medestudente se stemme gehoor.'

[Translation]

'I don't know if you experienced it like that as well, but since the Interwise session – that was a synchronous thing that we couldn't do at first – for me, there was absolute motivation that came to the fore, and the whole group dynamic. This is how I experienced it, and I think the reason for that will be, where you probably sat at your computer and all that stuff, this thing suddenly came to life, and you could hear the voices of your fellow students.'

Quote EM 4.20:

(Sorry for the delayed response due to technical problems)

I think the way the session was designed is great. One never stops learning as technology advanced to a greater degree. The preparations and the actual participation in the session made us learn to use technology and share the wonderful experience with other. \s. [sic] This was a lovely experience even with my family. The session worked more like a normal classroom with the interaction and communication to express ideas. The feel of listening to the instructor as if she was in the same room was really impressive. This was an experience of a life time [sic] even though there were a few technical problems.

*Lovely experience
Maria*

While asynchronous communication was described as 'clinical', another participant echoed Maria's positive experience by commenting that the *Interwise* session was more personal. She said as follows:

Quote FG 4.52:

'Warmer. Bietjie meer persoonlik, en dit voel nie dis jy teen die Internet nie. Dis bietjie jy en iemand anders teen die Internet. Dit gee meer persoonlikheid aan die ander persoon.'

[Translation]

'Warmer. A bit more personal and it doesn't feel it's you against the Internet. It is a little bit of you and someone else against the Internet. It enhances the presence of the other person.'

Although the participants had synchronous and asynchronous communication opportunities, the workload brought about by the course (especially the online

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module) negatively affected their ability to communicate. Participants expressed difficulty coping with the workload, the huge number of messages, and time constraints.

4.4.3 Expressing finding it difficult to cope

When the *CyberSurviver* module commenced, participants were attending classes on Thursday evenings, as they received a series of lessons in a particular subject. The amount of work they had to do was extreme. Two of the participants remarked as follows:

Quote FG 4.53:

'When we started this course, we actually had two courses together. Am I right? We came together on Thursday evenings for (lecturer's) databases, and then, after about three or four weeks, they said that we are going to stop this because there is so much work in the Surfiver module.'

Quote FG 4.54:

'And apart of the module that we were doing, we still had a task on something else. Yes, on something completely different, which we worked in Dreamweaver and Access databases.'

The workload of participants tripled due to being a master's student, having a family and being employed on a full-time basis. The workload of these students and the resulting time restrictions affected their ability to communicate and their commitment to the game. A participant explained the situation as follows:

Quote FG 4.55:

'I just didn't read them (e-mail). I just didn't have the time to even open them. If I recognised that it's something that's, you know, that's got to do with me. And then I think sometimes you missed important messages because you don't read all of them.'

The issue of the large number of e-mail messages was addressed by Rachel in e-mail to her peers. The large number of e-mails urged her to ask her peers for information on the e-mail, rather than read all of them herself. She wrote:

Quote FG 4.56:

*Sorry I didn't write to you all this time, my parents are visiting us this [sic] days and I was running from here to there. When I opened my Outlook this again this [sic] morning, I was shocked to see 150 mails!!! In short I need your help. Could you please tell me what is this game that I see [sic] in several e-mails? ...
Rachel*

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As opposed to Rachel and the participant mentioned above, one of the students felt the need to read all the e-mails, as she was of the opinion that they were informative. She said:

Quote FG 4.57:

'For me, in order to understand what's happening, I felt I had to open every e-mail and every message. I think it's a type of culture thing that you develop. I thought that I got a lot of information from reading some of the other e-mails. I think they didn't know that.'

By reading all e-mails, the above-mentioned participant obtained information on problems that could be expected, before she encountered them herself. She further stated:

Quote FG 4.58:

'Also you had people anticipating problems that you haven't encountered yet. You may be a bit slow, and somebody else is ahead of you and says: listen, I've got a really big problem with this scroll bar thing. So you would get a reply on a problem that you're going to run into before you even have the problem.'

Limited time not only prevented participants from reading e-mail or communicating with peers but also affected the quality of their assignments and the quality of time spent with family members. For these reasons, participants experienced the online module as a stressful event. One participant indicated that he repeatedly tried to succeed, but that he did not comprehend what he was doing owing to the pressure and time restrictions. He said:

Quote FG 4.59:

'... en ek dink jy't baie gedoen om te probeer en weer probeer maar jy't nie 'n clue wat het jy so gedoen [sic], omdat daar soveel tyddruk was.'

[Translation]

'... and I think you did a lot to try and try again, but you didn't have a clue of what you were doing, because it was a race against time.'

Hendrik, who sent the following e-mail to ask for information on assignments, also raised the issue of limited time. He wrote:

Quote EM 4.21:

Hi

Our (name of server) server/system (???) is up and running again!!! Linda did you post us an update of the (rest) of the assignments?? What must we do with the URL of our own web site (Individual Assignment 2)? Maybe I am also DOF [dull] or maybe I missed something due to our network (which was down) and the fact that I dont [sic] have time to read all 75 plus e-mails (from this group alone!!) from the past three days.

PLEASE HELP!!

Hendrik

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Not having enough time to attend to *CyberSurviver* assignments posed a problem for a number of other participants. The following three quotations are indicative of the effects that time restrictions and personal circumstances had on the efforts of participants:

Quote FG 4.60:

'First I went to my family, 'cause I was, all the time I was saying how much pressure... I needed time, because time was...'

Quote FG 4.61:

'So that was a lot of stress, because you knew that half of your mark now hung in the balance, because of something that doesn't work. But if it was only the mark as they put it - it was time that was going...'

Quote FG 4.62:

'So I don't want to, today, get into my own personal difficulties at that stage. It was horrendous. So it really meant rushing.'

In addition to time constraints and personal circumstances, which hampered efforts of participants to communicate and complete assignments, the use of English as the only official language during the *CyberSurviver* game posed a problem.

4.4.4 Language

The module was presented in English, being the one common language which all students could understand and in which they could communicate. English was however not the first language or mother tongue of any of the students. The fact that they had to communicate in English challenged them to the extent that they wrote their e-mail messages by using word processing software. One participant explained that she used the electronic spelling and grammar function to check her e-mail messages before she copied and pasted them into her e-mail composer. This participant said:

Quote FG 4.63:

'Ek is seker daar is baie ander ouens wat dit ook doen, en ek is oortuig daarvan dat baie mense nie deelgeneem het op die e-pos nie, omdat die taal 'n probleem was, want teen die tyd wat jy jou goed getik het en ge-edit het, en weer getik het, en seker gemaak het die spelling is reg en seker gemaak die tenses is reg ...'

[Translation]

'I am sure that there are many other people who do the same; and I'm convinced that many people did not participate via e-mail because language was a problem. Because by the time that you have typed and edited your stuff, and have typed it again, and have made sure the spelling is correct and have made sure the tenses are correct ...'

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The only other language that all participants, but one, could understand and speak to different degrees was Afrikaans. Therefore, Afrikaans was used by some participants when communicating via e-mail. The English-speaking participant pleaded with the others to communicate in English by sending the following e-mail:

Quote EM 4.22:

*Sorry I didn't understand could you write it in English please?!
Rachel*

The way in which the participant used punctuation (a question mark and an exclamation mark) might have indicated frustration with the language used by the other participants.

It seemed that a lack of English language skill made it difficult for some of the participants to communicate or to progress academically. One of the participants explicitly stated that the language barrier made them function on a lower cognitive level and impaired their ability to communicate. He felt that they could have communicated on a higher academic level if they were allowed to use their first languages, and if they had more time. He stated:

Quote FG 4.64:

'Ek dink ook dat 'n mens se akademiese deelname op 'n baie laer vlak, of baie minder is, as wat – ek dink jou akademiese deelname is baie minder op die e-pos as wat dit normaalweg sou wees.'

[Translation]

'I also think that a person's academic participation is on a much lower level, is far less than when – I think your academic participation is much less via e-mail compared to what it normally would be.'

This was confirmed by another participant who also stated that they would have communicated at a higher academic level had they more time and were they allowed to communicate in their first languages. He was also of the opinion that more issues of academic nature would have been discussed. Unfortunately, many of the e-mail messages contained cries for help, rather than meaningful academic discussion. The participant said:

Quote FG 4.65:

'... die kommunikasie, waar ek dink as, in die eerste plek dink ek dat as 'n mens dit in jou eerste taal gedoen het, en in die tweede plek dat jy 'n klein bietjie meer tyd gehad het, sou daar dieper, op 'n hoër vlak, akademiese goed uitgekome het. Dat 'n mens meer issues sou bespreek het, en meer akademiese kommunikasie gehad het. Want nou was die kommunikasie gebaseer op 'n help-asseblief-ek-gaan-versuip-vlak gewees.'

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[Translation]

'... the communication, where I think if, in the first place, I think if one could do it in your first language and, in the second place, that if you had a little more time, deeper and higher academic stuff would have come out. That one would have discussed more issues, and would have had communication that was more academic. But now the communication was based on a help-me-please-I'm-drowning level.'

Although English was the common denominator, it was not the language of preference. One participant felt that she was disadvantaged by not being able to do the module in Afrikaans. She said:

Quote FG 4.66:

'I think it's a disadvantage. I think that's the ...because 'specially, I think, because you had to do it in English, and you're Afrikaans.'

However, as the module proceeded, participants became less concerned about correct spelling and proper grammar usage. This was due to their heavy workload and associated deadlines. They had to submit assignments on Wednesdays and Sundays. One participant emphasised this change in attitude toward the use of proper English by stating that he later did not care whether he was discrediting his good name by using broken English, as he was trying to finish assignments in time.

Quote FG 4.67:

'Ek het later nie omgee ek slaan my naam met 'n plank nie, wat ek vir jou sê, jy't nie tyd gehad – jy weet, ek het nie tyd gehad om te spell check nie, want jy het so geveg vir die Woensdag-, of die Sondagaand se ding, dat jy weet, jy't nie tyd gehad nie. Jy't net gesê hoe jy sê, en klaar.'

[Translation]

'Later on I did not care if I ruined my good name, what I am saying to you, you didn't have time – you know, I didn't have time to do a spelling check, because you struggled so hard for the Wednesday or the Sunday evening thing, that you know, you didn't have time. You just said it how you said it, and that's it.'

The problems experienced by participants with regard to language usage did not prevent them from sharing both positive and negative emotions via e-mail.

4.4.5 Sharing positive and negative emotions

One participant compared the emotions that she experienced (the highs and lows) to a roller coaster ride. She said:

Quote FG 4.68:

'I think, um, ek dink as ek my emosies wil beskryf in daardie tyd, was dit 'n absolute roller coaster. Daar was jou op-oomblikke, daar was jou af-oomblikke. ...'

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So, vir my persoonlik, was dit roller coaster-oomblikke gewees. Oppe en affe regdeur, van die begin, tot en met einde. Maar uit retrospek [sic], as ek nou moet vergelyk, dan was die op vir my meer gewees as wat die af werklik was.'

[Translation]

'I think, um, I think if I wished to describe the emotions I had at the time, they were an absolute roller coaster. There were your moments of highs; there were your moments of lows. ...So, for me personally, they were roller coaster moments. Highs and lows throughout, from the beginning, straight through, up to the end. But, in retrospect, if I had to compare, then the highs were more than the lows really were.'

Another participant experienced positive and negative emotions but, unlike the previous student, did not feel that these emotions could be described as highs and lows. According to him, he constantly experienced both positive and negative emotions. These feelings could, however, not be described as ambivalence, as he constantly was experiencing positive or negative emotions about a variety of things. He explained this as follows:

Quote FG 4.69:

'My belewenis daarvan was nie roller coaster gewees nie. Myne was maar konstant gewees. Een van frustrasie aan die negatiewe kant, en dan beangstheid daarmee saam, as gevolg van die goed wat hulle alles genoem het, maar ook die positiewe goed wat daarmee saam gaan. So ek het hierdie kontrasterende emosies beleef die heelyd, maar op 'n konstante vlak – nie op en af die heelyd nie.'

[Translation]

'My experiences were nothing like a roller coaster. Mine were rather constant. Experiences of frustration on the negative side, and then anxiety with that, because of all the stuff they've mentioned, but also positive things that go with that. So, I experienced these contrasting emotions all the time, but on a constant level – not like highs and lows all the time.'

One participant explained the positive-negative scenario as a continuous hit-and-run situation. Attaining the skills that were required of him was a positive experience that made him react with excitement; he contacted the lecturer immediately to tell her that his assignment was on the site. He explained:

Quote FG 4.70:

*'Wel, as ons byvoorbeeld, wat was daardie – Java – Ja, joe, ek het my alie afgesukkel, en dit is die heelyd tref-en-trap, tref-en-trap, tref-en-trap. En, toe ek nou uitendelik sien hier hardloop hierdie oor my skerm, toe's dit soos in, ek is *and%\$# opgewonde. ... Ek het onmiddellik vir haar op Yahoo! Messenger gesê, kyk, my goed is op, en ek voel baie impressed met myself. So, dit was 'n absolute hoop vir my op daardie stadium...'*

[Translation]

*'Well, if we, for example, what was that – Java – Yes, whew! I found it very difficult, and all the time it was hit and run, hit and run, hit and run. And, then, eventually, when I saw it running on my screen, then, it was like, I was *and%\$# excited. ...I immediately told her on Yahoo! Messenger, look, my stuff is there, and I feel really impressed with myself. So, at that stage, it gave me such hope ...'*

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From the above quotations, it is clear that participants experienced a variety of emotions. How they communicated these emotions also differed from participant to participant. One participant explained that she found it difficult to express emotion via e-mail. She preferred face-to-face communication, as it was easier to express emotion by means of verbal and non-verbal communication behaviour. Face-to-face cooperative learning was important to this participant. She said:

Quote FG 4.71:

'I would say face-to-face communication, for me, was emotional, because now I can say: Joe, please help me. ... So we can, we can motivate each other. So face-to-face, for me, is emotion. How do you express emotion on an [sic] e-mail? You can use the face and all those type of things [emoticons], but here, I can go and cry on his shoulder or whatever. You want to work together with someone else in every task. Just to do it with someone else ... to talk to them.'

However, because of the only-online communication rule, participants were not supposed to communicate face-to-face. By using emoticons to transfer their feelings, participants could compensate for the lack of personal contact. The use of emoticons in *Yahoo! Messenger* assisted them in expressing themselves whilst they were communicating without seeing each other. This was confirmed by participants who said:

Quote FG 4.72:

'Ons het baie van Yahoo! se emoticons gebruik.'

[Translation]

'We used many of Yahoo!'s emoticons.'

Quote FG 4.73:

'Ja, veral Yahoo! Messenger se emoticons. As ons iets gesê het, het ons gesmile, of jou wange het so dik gestaan van boosheid, en al daardie tipe van ding. So, ek dink in daardie opsig kon ons darem nog emosies ook deel – oordra – terwyl ons met mekaar kon kommunikeer. As jy 'n ding wou gil, dan kon jy hom gil met 'n emoticon.'

[Translation]

'Yes, especially the emoticons of Yahoo! Messenger. If we said something, we smiled, or you puffed out your cheeks of anger, and that kind of thing. So, I think, in that respect we might have shared – transferred - emotions too – while we were communicating. If you wished to shout something, you could shout it with an emoticon.'

However, not all participants believed that e-mail with emoticons was a suitable medium for expressing emotion. They were of the opinion that e-mail allowed the use of only emoticons and words, was indirect and clinical, and did not allow of spontaneous reactions. The following quotations are relevant:

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Quote FG 4.74:

'No, emoticons. We were supposed to use that for e-mails. Otherwise, you just type words, you only have words.'

Quote FG 4.75:

'Ja [Yes], the e-mail's very clinical. I can use fifty emoticons. I will still not express myself.'

Quote FG 4.76:

'Also, you don't moan and groan ... so lekker [so well] over an e-mail [sic].'

Quote FG 4.77:

'Ja [Yes], I cannot express myself over an e-mail [sic]. You know how to say it, but sometimes you just, you just need to go to somebody and just aflaaai [offload]. ... It's not spontaneous, the e-mail.'

The main objection was that participants could not express themselves sufficiently via e-mail (including emoticons), as e-mail was not a communication medium that lent itself toward spontaneity. Despite this objection, many of the participants did use emoticons to express emotion. It seemed that they not only succeeded in transferring emotion but also found it a fun thing to do. The following examples showed that participants used emoticons to stress the messages that they wanted to convey. These emoticons did not belong to *Yahoo! Messenger*, but were composed of keyboard symbols and characters. Regarding the following e-mail message, Gérard used an emoticon to indicate humour:

Quote EM 4.23:

*I agree about Telkom – apparently the 'new' landline company is on the way! I'll be the 1st client!
: -)
Gérard*

Anette used emoticons when she apologetically asked assistance from the lecturer. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.24:

*Sorry to bother you so much, Linda, but I found the quiz again! Seems I am clumsy in navigating around half-screens sitting on top of each other ; -) especially when stressed out by test conditions. :~) is that a sheep-face?
Anette*

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Mindy sent the following e-mail to Gérard, requesting help:

Quote EM 4.25:

Gérard jy sal meer detail as dit moet gee, want ek spook nog steeds om my website op Hagar te kry!! Ek verstaan nie lekker wat jy bedoel met die kommunikasie tussen Windows Explorer en Internet Explorer nie - kan jy asb weer verduidelik (of dalk prentjies teken :-))

Groetnis

Mindy

[Translation]

Gérard, you have to be more specific than that, because I'm still breaking my back trying to get my website onto [sic] Hagar!! I do not quite understand what you mean by communication between Windows Explorer and Internet Explorer – will you explain again, please (or could you draw some pictures :-))

Greetings

Mindy

Even when conversing by means of *Yahoo! Messenger*, some participants used keyboard-generated emoticons. Unfortunately, no dates were indicated on the printouts of the *Yahoo! Messenger* conversations. The following quotations were drawn from synchronous conversations in *Yahoo! Messenger* between the lecturer, Linda, and three participants on separate occasions, and indicated how emoticons were used in synchronous communication:

Quote EM 4.26:

Mindy (10:27:03 PM): Lekker slaap I-) [Translation: Sleep tight]

linda_van_ryneveld_sa (10:31:09 PM): =; Tata! [Translation: Goodbye]

Quote EM 4.27:

linda_van_ryneveld_sa (09:10:44 PM): She must be nice then;)

Rachel (09:10:58 PM): no need to say...:">

Quote EM 4.28:

Gérard (09:02:13 PM): Now where am I supposed to find out what a LMS is? Sounds dangerously close to PMS!! :-)

linda_van_ryneveld_sa (09:01:44 PM): LOL!

linda_van_ryneveld_sa (09:02:21 PM): And almost as much of a pain at times :)

Gérard (09:03:25 PM): I will look far and wide...

linda_van_ryneveld_sa (09:03:14 PM): Good!

Gérard (09:04:03 PM): Bye!

linda_van_ryneveld_sa (09:03:46 PM): Bye!

Sharing emotions (positive and negative) bound the participants together as a group. A feeling of closeness developed between tribe members. This bond was so strong at some stage that one of the participants felt it would be wrong to get rid of a person by voting her/him out, because they '*came a long way together*'. Despite the difficulties associated with asynchronous communication, the hard work required of participants during the module, and the long hours, one participant missed being able to speak to

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people at one o'clock in the morning and to say 'good luck'. Altruistic viewpoints such as these are evident in the following quotations:

Quote FG 4.78:

'Ja, ek dink almal sal saamstem dat dit die module is waarin ons die hardste gewerk het, en dit was regtig – ekskuus vir die Engelse woord – exciting om eenuur in die oggend op die Net te gaan, en jy sien met Yahoo! Messenger, oh!, daardie ou is ook online. En dan tik-tik-tik jy gou, en jy sê: sterkte. Ek mis dit...'

[Translation]

'Yes, I think everybody would agree that this was the module where we worked the hardest, and it was really – pardon the English word – exciting, to go online at one o'clock in the morning, and you see with Yahoo! Messenger, oh! that guy is also online. And then you quickly type, type, type, and you say: good luck. I miss that ...'

Quote FG 4.79:

'Ons het op 'n stadium in ons groep gekom wat ek gevoel het ek kan nie iemand uitstem nie. Ons het te lank saamgekom en so, en ek het vir Linda ge-e-mail en gesê ek kan nie stem nie, en sy't gesê, wel, dan's dit 'n random storie.'

[Translation]

'We reached a point in our group where I felt I could not vote anyone out. We came a too long way together and so, and I e-mailed Linda and told her that I could not vote, and she said: Well, then it's a random story.'

It could be assumed that participants went through many emotional phases, and risk-taking behaviour was evident at more than one stage during the game. The extent of their emotions became obvious when participants were asked (during a focus group interview) to name the feelings that they experienced during the online module. Participants named the following feelings:

- ☉ Vreugde [Joy]
- ☉ Angstigheid [Anxiety]
- ☉ Keelvol [Fed up]
- ☉ Onsekerheid [Uncertainty]
- ☉ Moegheid [Tiredness]
- ☉ Kwaad [Anger]
- ☉ Arm, jy't arm gevoel [Poor, one felt poor]
- ☉ Jy't verlig gevoel [One felt relief]
- ☉ Ontnugter [Disillusioned]
- ☉ Lekker kry [Enjoyment]
- ☉ Verwondering [Amazement]
- ☉ Achiement
- ☉ Jaloesie [Jealousy]

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- ☉ Ja, groepsgevoel [Yes, group feeling]
- ☉ Belonging
- ☉ Kompetisie [Competition]
- ☉ Alleenheid [Loneliness]

The variety of positive emotions, such as joy, amazement, and a feeling of belonging, most probably motivated students to succeed, and strengthened their internal drive and value system, while the different negative emotions experienced by participants, such as anxiety, anger, disillusionment and loneliness, could have contributed to a student failing or dropping out of the module. The third cluster of *Curative Factors* that could have contributed to the staying power of a student, namely the *Internal Drive and Value System*, will be discussed next.

4.5 Internal drive and value system

Factors that convinced students to work or try very hard and that made them determined to complete the module were included in this cluster. Definitions and criteria denoting the internal drive and value system are presented in Table 4.4. Criteria that indicated whether statements should be included in or excluded from such a cluster, are presented in the last two rows of Table 4.4.

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Table 4.4: Denoting internal drive and value system

	Internal drive	Value system
Definitions	<p>Drive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ <i>'... biological states of an organism and the stimuli leading or motivating it to a given behaviour'</i> (Williams 1983:57) ☉ <i>'Also known as: need, impulse, tension, urge or appetite'</i> (Williams 1983:57) ☉ <i>'To impel, goad, or force into some act or condition receiver; strong motivating urge or stimulus that incites an animal or person to action'</i> (Collier's Dictionary 1977:311). ☉ <i>'An innate biologically determined urge. Determination and ambition'</i> (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002:355). <p>Internal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ <i>'Relating to or existing on the inside; relating to or existing in the mind of receiver'</i> (Collier's Dictionary 1977:537). ☉ <i>'Of or situated on the inside. Experienced in one's mind'</i> (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002:602). 	<p>Value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ <i>'Principles or standards of an individual or group; ideals receiver'</i> (Collier's Dictionary 1977:1103). ☉ <i>'The regard that something is held to deserve; importance or worth'</i> (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002:1298). <p>System:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ <i>'Group of things or parts related or combined in such a way as to form a unified or complex whole'</i> (Collier's Dictionary 1977:1013). ☉ <i>'A complex whole; a set of things working together as a mechanism or interconnecting network'</i> (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary 2002:1189).
Criteria	Verbal expressions relating to coping.	Statements based on moral issues.
Criteria for inclusion in cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ Explanations of: ☉ How students dealt with problems; ☉ Willpower to succeed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☉ Expressions of feelings of guilt. ☉ Statements indicative of breaking rules. ☉ Indications of assistance to each other.
Criteria for exclusion from cluster	Verbal expressions of not being able to cope.	It was difficult to exclude anything from this cluster, as the actions of participants were based on personal value systems, whether they were positive or negative, good or bad.

Internal drive is linked to coping. The South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002:254) defines *'cope'* as *'Deal effectively with something difficult'*, while Collier's Dictionary (1977:222) defines the term as *'be able to handle'*. When the participants were asked how they coped in the online environment, they were not sure how to respond at first. A participant then asked: *'Cope meaning what?'* The interviewer assisted by explaining as follows:

Quote FG 4.80:

'Okay, how could you do what was expected in that environment? How did you cope? Cope can also be emotionally. Coping could be behaviour and coping could be emotionally. It can be academically - how you managed your cognitive style. Time, finances, online environment.'

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A participant responded by explaining the word 'cope' philosophically. He said:

Quote FG 4.81:

'I think it is a very loaded word. You know, it's really not a simplistic thing to me. I don't see it as only being able to academically survive. The communication was a problem, as well as the getting to know the environment, how to manoeuvre ...'

It seemed that this participant understood the complexity of their experiences. Another participant, however, did not find the question on coping difficult to answer. S/he responded as follows:

Quote FG 4.82:

'No, I coped well; accept for the time and finances. That was something I could not cope with.'

Participants' responses during the focus group interviews revealed the following issues relating to their internal drive and value system:

- ☐ Negative emotions such as feeling agitated (frustration);
- ☐ Feeling threatened and exposed;
- ☐ Self-image and image;
- ☐ Positive descriptions of experience;
- ☐ Feedback from the lecturer;
- ☐ Negative experiences of module not being a game.

The word '*frustration*' was used by a number of participants to describe their feelings.

4.5.1 Negative emotions such as feeling agitated (frustration)

Their reasons for being frustrated varied from being unsure about what was expected of them, experiencing time restrictions, and feeling incompetent when tribal assignments had to be completed. One participant rationalised their feeling of frustration by saying that it was part of the job. However, in the case of the following participant, frustration turned into excitement when the problem was solved. He said:

Quote FG 4.83:

'Frustrasies het ingekom as jy nie presies geweet het wat van jou verwag word nie, maar soos wat jy deur dit geswoeg en gesweet het, en jy kom uiteindelik- veral as jy ernstige frustrasies gehad het-, en jy kom eventueel by daardie aha-belewenis uit, dan wil jy jubel van opgewondenheid, want jy't uiteindelik bereik wat jy aanvanklik nie mooi geweet het waarnatoe is ons nou oppad nie.'

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[Translation]

'Frustrations emerged when you did not know exactly what was expected of you, but as you plodded along, and you eventually reached, especially if your frustrations were severe, and you eventually reached that aha! experience, then you wanted to shout of joy, because you eventually achieved what you initially did not understand well - the course we were taking.'

Time restrictions led to high levels of frustration. One participant felt that the only option was to be voted out. Another participant felt that one extra day to complete assignments would have made a difference to his frustration level and the possible attainment of outcomes set for assignments. They are quoted below:

Quote FG 4.84:

'Ek het op 'n stadium self gevoel dat as... jy werk so lank om iets reg te kry, en jy sukkel so, dat jy op 'n stadium kom, dan dink jy: luister, nou't ek genoeg gehad. Ek het nou genoeg tyd hieraan spandeer. Ek het nie langer ure om hieraan te spandeer nie. Mag hulle my nou maar asseblief net uit die span uit vote.'

[Translation]

'At one stage I felt that if ... you work for so many hours to accomplish something, and it's such a struggle, you reach a stage that you think: listen, now I had enough! I've spent enough time on this. I don't have any more hours to spend on this. Please, they might just as well vote me out of the team.'

Quote FG 4.85:

'Dit het ongelooflike frustrasies veroorsaak. Jy weet jy moet sekere goed doen, en jy weet as jy net, net 'n dag ekstra tyd het om daaraan aandag te gee, of êrens 'n dummyboek te gaan opsoek, dan gaan jy dit dalk regkry, ...'

[Translation]

It caused terrible frustrations. You knew you had to do certain things, and you knew if you only, only had one extra day to attend to those, or to go and look up a dummy book, then you might get it right, ...'

While one participant philosophised that frustration was part of the job, another participant pinpointed tribal expectations versus lack of skill as the reason for being frustrated. They said the following:

Quote FG 4.86:

'There were times I got frustrated, ag [oh], but I could understand the frustration goes with, you know, that it's work...'

Quote FG 4.87:

'Maar daar was tribal, jy weet, tribal frustrations in die sin dat, jy weet dat jy voel, jy weet, jy't nie die ding reg gedoen nie, of jy weet nie hoe om dit te doen nie, en jy ...'

[Translation]

'But there were tribal, you know, tribal frustrations in the sense that, you knew that you ... didn't do the thing correctly, or you didn't know how to do it, and you ...'

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Not having the appropriate knowledge and skills with regard to software was expressed by another participant as a cause of frustration. She wrote:

Quote FG 4.88:

'So daar was tegniese goed van 'n ou gevra om dit te kan doen – ek wil amper vir jou sê software applications wat jy moes hanteer, wat ek geen, geen benul van gehad het nie. Dit was vir my 'n groot frustrasie.'

[Translation]

'So technical stuff was required of a person to be able to do that - I'm inclined to say software applications that you had to use that I knew nothing, nothing about. For me, that was a huge frustration.'

Another participant, who agreed to that, experienced frustration to such an extent that she wanted to be voted out. She said:

Quote FG 4.89:

'Dit was regtig 'n groot frustrasie, en dis, ek het op 'n stadium regtig gedink, en ek het ook gesê aan iemand: luister, vote my asseblief net uit. Ek het nou genoeg gespook...'

[Translation]

'It really was a big frustration, and it was, at one stage, I really thought, and I also told somebody: listen, just vote me out, please. I've struggled enough ...'

Participants verbalised their frustrations in e-messages to the lecturer. Some of these messages were straightforward, while others were interspersed with comments that could be regarded as sarcasm or self-ridicule. Solina simply stated:

Quote EM 4.29:

*Linda please help me I can't find games, and tasks for different tribes/groups.
Frustrated.
Solina*

Gérard's frustration was evident in the manner he ended his e-mail to Linda. He wrote:

Quote EM 4.30:

*Hi Linda
... I have volunteered to do this, but I struggle to get hold of my group! I receive no response from them! I will do the website with the 2 people that I have contact with. ...I basically want to know if it will be OK if we do not do the assignments with the rest of the group?
Frustrated greeting
Gérard*

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Gérard's frustration at not being able to locate some of his team members was apparent from the sarcastic undertone of another e-mail message that he sent to Linda. He wrote:

Quote EM 4.31:

*Dear Linda (or anybody with a solution)
Did anybody leave the course/module? We have a few tribe members who seem to be 'gone'.
What do we do?
Gérard
Virtual Eves' only Adam*

Barbara's e-mail message to Gérard, which was heavy with sarcasm and self-ridicule, showed her frustration at not being able to solve a problem. She later apologised to Gérard. These messages read as follows:

Quote EM 4.32:

*I guess us ol' fashioned [sic] folks from Mshengu tribe (who still copy and paste using scissors and glue) would follow some of these things the long way round. No wonder it still is so blurry. The use of more and more acronyms hit me below the belt. Maybe we should have had beginner module posted to us over the holidays just to look into terms and concepts (and their meanings). Remember light holiday reading?
Barbara*

Quote EM 4.33:

*Hi Gérard
I wrote this when I was nice and frustrated yesterday after the Internet café was closed.
eGreetings ye all*

Self-ridicule and sarcasm were apparent from the e-mail message that Mindy sent when she posted the result of an assignment. She included a sentence that expressed her frustration, and wrote down an alias (in the form of an Afrikaans expression) that characterised a female person who was feeling sorry for herself and wanted others to pity her. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.34:

*From: Mindy
Hier is my poging - smaak my ek maak en is en voel nou sommer net klaar!!
Groetnis
Mindy (alias Martie Martelgat)*

[Translation]

*From: Mindy
This is my effort – seems to me I'm wrapping up, and is done, and feel done in!!
Regards
Mindy (alias Martha the Martyr)*

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Although she was denying it, sarcasm caused by frustration was also evident in Camilla's e-mail message with regard to her efforts to upload files onto the tribal site. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.35:

*I have a lot of trouble uploading my files. Got it partially loaded in my own website. Could not get anything going on the Uno website. Sorry, Pedro. At least I did not mess the whole site up! <http://www.geocities.com/...> My pictures and CSS file did not kick in. Must I upload them separately too? The example of the screensaver did not go accross [sic] either! Any advice form [sic] the ones who managed to do it all?
No sarcasm intended at all!
Camilla*

The lecturer's efforts to stimulate discussion and encourage e-communication led to more frustration among participants. The reaction of the participants seemed to relate to their workload and frustration levels at the time. Bob, seemingly annoyed, complained about a question thrown at them by the lecturer. The e-messages containing the question and Bob's reaction reads as follows:

Quote EM 4.36:

(Linda) The first person to respond to this e-mail with the correct answers will win a (real) reward on Thursday evening.
1. Could anyone explain what an IP address is?
2. How do you know what your IP address is at any given time?
Who will it be...?

Quote EM 4.37:

(Bob) I hate to cry foul here, but since our method of communication is asynchronous, this sort of thing is hardly fair. I was not online when the message was sent and so did'nt [sic] have a fair crack at answering it. This is a question some people can answer without Googling, but I assume it is now too late!
Bob

Rachel shared his frustration and responded with the following message:

Quote EM 4.38:

I agree with you and would like to add that we do the same thing in class and so the question is why do [sic] it at all? What is the importance of competitions?
Rachel

Linda had her reasons for posting questions such as these from time to time, and responded to the complaints as follows:

Quote EM 4.39:

Linda Van Ryneveld wrote:
About the fairness of the synchronicity of this particular competition ... Who ever said that anything in life was fair? ;-)

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You will have to get used to my constant stirring. I usually stir because the list is so quiet, but if we have achieved one thing this week, it is the number of messages on the list.

During one of the focus group interviews, a participant said that he felt annoyed about these questions introduced by the lecturer throughout the module. He was of the opinion that she asked questions between main assignments just to frustrate them. He ignored some of the lesser assignments, as he regarded them as unnecessary and did not have the time to do them. He said:

Quote FG 4.90:

'n Ander ding wat ook, ek weet nie of julle dit so ervaar het nie, maar partykeer het Linda 'n ding ingegooi, soos haar heel eerste vraag oor body synchronism. Dan wat [sic] ek so hard besig om nou nog hierdie goed uit te figure wat sy gevra het, nou kom hierdie vraag. Dan voel ek, ag, wag nou net eers, dat ek net eers hierdie uitgesort kan kry, byvoorbeeld: wat's 'n IP-adres? Jy weet, sulke tipe van goed wat ek gevoel het, ek het nie krag hiervoor nie, en uhm, wat ek dan gedoen het, is ek storm op 'n search, en ek soek iets oor 'n IP-adres. Ek lees hom nie eers behoorlik nie. Ek copy en ek paste net. Daar's my weergawe, en ek gaan aan.'

[Translation]

'Another thing that also, I don't know if you experienced it this way, but sometimes Linda threw a thing at us, like her first question on body synchronism. At that moment, I was still struggling to figure out this stuff that she wanted; now this question appears. Then I feel, oh, just hold your horses, so that I can first sort this out. For example: What's an IP address? You know, this sort of thing that I felt, I do not have the strength for this, and um, then what I did, I quickly did a search, and I looked for something about an IP address. I didn't even read it properly. I only copied and pasted. There's my version, and I go on.'

Another participant ignored the questions that he could not answer and said that he did not have the time or energy to respond. He also thought that it was the intention of the lecturer to irritate them. He wrote:

Quote FG 4.91:

'Ek het half gevoel dit is dalk bedoel vir mens om 'n frustrasie te wees [sic], en ek het dit dienooreenkomstig hanteer. Ek het na die vraag gekyk, en as ek nie op die oomblik die antwoord kon sien nie, dan het ek dit doodeenvoudig geïgnoreer, want ek het net gevoel dit was dalk haar doel om ons te irriteer daarmee, en ons te side track van wat ons mee besig is, en regtig, tyd was 'n ongelooflike probleem gewees. Want as 'n ou, ek werk op deadlines, en dan werk ek reeds vyftien uur 'n dag. Dan het ek nie nog tyd om agt uur die aand, of van ses in die aand tot ses in die oggend op die Internet te wees om te sukkel om goed reg te kry nie.'

[Translation]

'I sort of felt maybe it was meant to be a frustration to a person, and I treated it accordingly. I looked at the question, and if I couldn't see the answer that very minute, then I plainly and simply ignored it, because I just felt it probably was her intention to irritate us with that, and to get us sidetracked from what we were doing, and really, time was an unbelievable problem. Because, if a guy, I have to meet deadlines, and then I have already worked fifteen hours a day. Then I did not have the time to be on the Internet from eight o'clock in the evening, or from six in the evening till six in the morning, to try and get things right.'

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Not only did some participants experience frustration but they also felt threatened and exposed.

4.5.2 Feeling threatened and exposed

At the second focus group interview, participants were requested to verbalise the feelings that they experienced during the online module. The following quotations explained that participants felt threatened and exposed:

Quote FG 4.92:

'Definitely uncertainty. About not knowing what was going to happen. Never having done this before.'

Quote FG 4.93:

'And stressed. I felt stressed initially.'

Quote FG 4.94:

'Sort of being afraid that I'm not going to cope. I won't be able to do this thing. Feeling afraid that you can't cope.'

Quote FG 4.95:

'Ja [yes], isolation. The isolation is tremendous. Especially late at night'

Quote FG 4.96:

'I think one feel exposed when you are writing the e-mails and even the letters, because you have to put more thought into what you're doing, because you feel maybe I'm asking a stupid question or I'm just not understanding the problem, so now I'm asking somebody else for the answer, and, so. I had a feeling, you're kind of feeling exposed as well.'

Quote FG 4.97:

'I think initially, I was a lurker, and later on, you started to – ja [yes], like Camilla said, to expose yourself. I'm going to make a fool out of myself by doing something or saying something ...'

[My emphasis]

Refer to Quote FG 4.32 as well. Emotions such as anxiety, stress, and fear (also fear of making a fool of oneself) were brought about by the manner in which the module was presented. Participants were required to work in teams and had to interact, as the module was hosted in the format of a game (*CyberSurviver*). Factors such as diverse personalities and differences in personal experience and background might have contributed to the high level of anxiety experienced by participants. Some felt that they did not know enough or did not possess the necessary skills to participate in a tribe. One of the participants indicated that her anxiety was caused by many things. She said:

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Quote FG 4.98:

'Ek dink een van die dinge wat ek moet sê, is: dit het my baie angstig gemaak. Daar's baie wat my vreeslike angs gegee het.'

[Translation]

'I think one of the things that I should say, is - it made me very anxious. There were many (things) that made me (feel) terribly afraid.'

Another participant felt that her anxiety was caused by feelings of incompetence and the fact that team members were often unavailable. She explained as follows:

Quote FG 4.99:

'Veral die spanwerk. Jy weet, dis baie, het vir my angstig gemaak, want ek was altyd bang, jy weet, ek was nie kompetent genoeg om in die span te kan deelneem nie, ..., jy weet, dit was vir my baie moeilik. Dit is een ding, en die ander ding wat ek ook wil sê, is, ek dink hierdie ding wat mens ook angstig gemaak het, is jou spanlede was nie altyd – of jou tribe members – was nie altyd aan diens of op lyn gewees wanneer.... So ons het baie meer cross-tribal relationships gehad soos wat jy inter-tribal relationships geontwyk het, bloot-en-al vir die tye wat 'n mens op lyn was. Maar daar was tribal, jy weet, tribal frustration in die sin dat, jy weet, dat jy voel, jy weet, jy't nie die ding reg gedoen nie, of jy weet nie hoe om dit te doen nie, ...'

[Translation]

'Especially, teamwork. You know, stacks of, it made me anxious, because I was afraid, you know, I wasn't competent enough to participate in the team, ... you know, for me, it was very difficult. That was the one thing, and the other thing I want to say is, I think what made one anxious, your team members were not always – or the members of your tribe – were not always working or online when ... So, we had many more cross-tribal relationships as we dodged inter-tribal relationships, just because you were online. But there was tribal, you know, tribal frustration in the sense that, you know, you feel, you know, you didn't do it correctly, or you don't know how to do it, ...'

The unknown factor (the unknown nature of the module) enhanced the anxiety of a participant who said that previous knowledge and experience were not applicable to the *CyberSurviver* learning environment. She also expressed a fear of exposing her feeling of incompetence. She said:

Quote FG 4.100:

'n Groot bron van angs vir my was dat die goed so geweldig nuut en anders was met die tweerigting – jou res van jou vorige lewe se kennis help jou niks. Jy voel jy sit hierso, totaal nakend en sukkel. Jy't niks wat jou bietjie half hoop gee in jou onkunde nie. En die feit dat jy 'n span is, dat jou dommigheid maak, jy weet, is so ontmasker. Jy kan nie soort van soos 'n brief skryf wat net jy en die ou wat dit nasien dit sien, en nie almal sien watse nonsens vang jy aan nie. Ek dink dis wat die angs bring.'

[Translation]

'For me, a big cause for concern was that everything was so dreadfully new and different with the two-way – all the knowledge from your previous life meant nothing. You feel you are sitting here – stark naked and struggling. You have nothing that give you even a bit of hope while you are in the dark. And the fact that you're a team, that your stupidity, you know, is so exposed. You can't write

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something such as a letter so that only you and the person that is marking it can see what nonsense you've been up to. I think that's making you anxious.'

The fear of exposing oneself, especially by communicating feelings via e-mail, affected the communication between participants. One participant specifically said that she was unable to convey her true feelings, as she was afraid that she would be misinterpreted. She also did not want the whole group to know how she felt. She said:

Quote FG 4.101:

'But I think one of the most important things, for me, about communicating on the e-mail, is the exposure element. Because I can imagine talking quite emotionally. ... It is not because I only have the words, it is the exposure thing. I'm going to kill Gerard now. I am so frustrated. I am really sick, but I don't want to tell it to the whole group. I'm not even talking about the whole tribe. I'm talking about the big scene, you know.'

Participants were also aware that people had different ideas, and were afraid that they might be misinterpreted. For this reason, some decided not to participate in e-conversations. This is evident in the following quotation:

Quote FG 4.102:

'We look at things that are the same differently...than the things that we do. That's why, most of the time, we don't write things because we are afraid that this is...this is evident and so on. The thing is here, it's basically misinterpreted, like I can write 'really' in big letters and in brackets, and someone will understand it, and then it will be offence like -. But if I do it with my body language, then it won't be offending. So, there are all kinds of ways. Because of my body, you can look at the situation as if it is a positive situation and everything, where on my e-mail, it won't be the same.'

Feeling scared of being 'exposed' also related to the self-image/image of participants. Some felt they had an image to uphold and should not be caught using English grammar incorrectly, as they were master's students. One particular participant indicated typing her e-mail message in MSWord, spell checking it, and then pasting it onto the e-mail composer. She explained as follows:

Quote FG 4.103:

'Jy weet nie wat weet die ander nie, en jy weet jy weet te min, maar jy weet nie of hulle ook so min weet of minder of meer weet as jy nie. Ek persoonlik, het eers my goed in Word getik, en dit dan gespell check, en dit dan gecut en paste... jy moet onthou, ons is darem M-studente, né. Jy kan mos nou nie jou "is's" en "am's" en "are's" verkeerdom sit nie.'

[Translation]

'You don't know what the others know, and you know you don't know enough, but you do not know if they also know as little, or more, or less than you. I, personally, typed my stuff in Word first and then I did a spelling check, and then I

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cut and pasted it... you must remember, we are MA students, after all. Why, you cannot put your is's and am's and are's the wrong way round.'

Also refer to Quote FG 4.63 (Subsection 4.4.4). A second participant also followed these measures of typing in MSWord and using the MSWord spellchecker before sending e-messages. However, unlike the previous participant, this student was convinced that her peers did not use the spellchecker, but were able to send their messages immediately. The following quotation was indicative of just how exposed she felt owing to the lack of information on the skills of her peers. She said:

Quote FG 4.104:

'The online Telkom messenger, for me, it was a checking thing with my spelling mistakes. So I was using Word, and while I'm on Word, checking my spelling mistakes and then cut and paste, where the others were writing to the messenger right away.'

Another participant described the language handicap as a disadvantage and a dilemma. She said:

Quote FG 4.105:

'Not exposed. It's a dilemma. ... I think it's a disadvantage. I think that's the ... because 'specially, I think, because you had to do it in English, and you're Afrikaans.'

Initially, participants were concerned about their image as Magister Artium (MA) students, their ability to express themselves in English, as well as the possibility of losing face, but as time went by and pressure increased with regard to deadlines and assignments, 'surviving' the *CyberSurviver* module became priority. One participant mentioned that she no longer had the time to use the spellchecker, and her priority changed to meeting deadlines on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. She said:

Quote FG 4.106:

'Jy't hierdie ontsettende – want dis ook waar die angstigheid inkom. Jy's bang jy slaan jou naam met 'n plank. Ek het later nie omgegee ek slaan my naam met 'n plank nie, want ek vir jou sê [sic], jy't nie tyd gehad – jy weet, ek het nie tyd gehad om te spell check nie, want jy het so geveg vir die Woensdag-, of die Sondagaand se ding, dat jy weet, jy't nie tyd gehad nie. Jy't net gesê hoe jy sê, en klaar.'

[Translation]

'You have this terrible – because this is where the anxiety comes in. You're afraid of ruining your good name. Later on I didn't care if I was ruining my good name, what I'm saying to you, you didn't have time – you know, I didn't have time to do a spelling check, because you struggled so hard to do the Wednesday or the Sunday evening thing, that you know, you didn't have time. You just said it how you said it, and that's it.'

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Interesting though, was the manner in which some participants attempted to cope with their situation by employing humour. Camilla sent the following e-mail to inform the lecturer of her effort with regard to an assignment:

Quote EM 4.40:

Here is my best effort. Three barriers prevented a higher score.

- 1. Poor eye-hand coordination. (a little bit to do, also, with growing up in the precyber-era) [sic]*
- 2. Inadequate breeding programme. (I don't have a child who can help me:-)*
- 3. Environmental factors. (None of the children in my school can improve on my score:-)*

Camilla

The following e-messages were indicative of how humour was used as a coping mechanism and as an antidote to anxiety and stress. Participants discussed rewarding either a crown or a pumpkin for excellence or stupidity. Joanita and Camilla had the following e-mail conversation that could be accessed by all participants:

Quote EM 4.41:

At our school we have a pumpkin (and a crown). The pumpkin is given to any person who made a really stupid mistake. The crown is given to any person who went out of his/her way to help another one. The person who has the pumpkin or crown may decide whom to give it next. Until that stage it stays his/hers. Let's start this tradition. I think some of you will know to whom the crown should go, then please do so (remember - only one crown and one pumpkin). Let it be the first person to award the crown. The pumpkin is not difficult. I receive it for being really very, very stupid. You can look at the attachment to see it. If you know of any other really stupid mistake, please let me know. It is not good for my self-esteem to keep it for too long!

Joanita

Quote EM 4.42:

Joanita, You can't just get it without confessing what the stupid mistake was that you made. If you get it for just being stupid, it implies mental handicap, which is a disability. For that you may not be penalised as these people have rights too! I think I deserve it more for being unable to open and creat [sic] the file to upload my web goodies. It is really a simple task, which left a large dent in my self-esteem. At some stage I considered taking up crocheting or some other suitable hobby for someone my age.

Camilla

Ps. This was the quote of the day - very appropriate for all of us who are battle weary!

An invincible determination can accomplish almost anything and in this lays the great distinction between great men and little men. Thomas Fuller (1608-1661, British Clergyman, Author)

Note the support and encouragement given by Camilla in the form of a 'quotation of the day' about accomplishments. The following day an enquiry was made with regard to the location of the pumpkin, as Joanita did something that convinced her that she should have the pumpkin. She sent the following e-mail:

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Quote EM 4.43:

*Subject: [eLearn2002] Waar's daardie pampoen? [Translation] Where's that pumpkin?
Camilla,
Do you have the pumpkin? I just won it! So please forward it to the shameful new owner.
Joanita
Oh, what did I do?
I created a separate group for tribe 3. (nice idea!)
I then forgot the password (nothing new!) and locked myself out because I forgot to put my own name on the members list and made it a closed group!*

Joanita also conversed with Bob via e-mail about their inability to perform certain tasks. At the end of the conversation, a sheepish kind of humour came to the fore. Their e-conversation is quoted below:

Quote EM 4.44:

(Joanita) Am I the only dof [dull] one?

Quote EM 4.45:

(Bob) This is a nightmare. This is the point!

Quote EM 4.46:

(Joanita) I played the game – mainly because it was the easiest part. I struggle to get the game's Top 20 list 'active'. It seems as though the link is not working. Will someone please tell me how to do it? 'Help' did not help.

Quote EM 4.47:

(Joanita) Then I tried to find my 'shelter' on the island to figure out where we are suppose [sic] to port our 'findings' on ASP – but they were not yet 'activated'.

Quote EM 4.48:

(Bob) Now what now?

Quote EM 4.49:

(Joanita) It is too early to make a decision on what tool/service/product we are going to review. I thought the idea was to find as many as possible and not to review only one or two? How are we suppose [sic] to present it? Online? One of the famous show and tell power point [sic] efforts?... Just grab one end and do it I just took the first thing that came along!

Quote EM 4.50:

*(Bob) Do what?...
What tribal assignments?
(Joanita) These are in the PDF docs you should have received a few days ago!
(Bob) Thanks, what are we suppose [sic] to discuss in the chatroom?
(Joanita?) Beats me! I am really a bit 'dof' [dull] and very 'deurmekaar' [confused] or are we suppose [sic] to feel this way?
(Bob) Keep on smiling! Ha, ha
Good luck!
Bob*

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By having these conversations online, exposing their lack of skills, and asking assistance, participants indicated their desire to be successful. In some instances, the desire to succeed could be related to self-image, while some participants wished to succeed because they were concerned about how other people perceived them.

4.5.3 Self-image and image

During one of the focus group interviews, participants were asked about the way they handled the difficulties they mentioned. Some students were self-motivated and their internal drive overshadowed any negative experiences they had. One student simply wanted to do well, so he stayed up until he understood the task and its requirements. He said:

Quote FG 4.107:

'Ja [Yes], I knew I wanted to have good marks for this module as well, so even if I had to stay up until three or four o'clock or whatever, until I understood the task or whatever, I just had to do it. That was my internal motivation.'

Some participants achieved success because they had the desire to succeed. Others prepared for the module by taking additional courses, while personal characteristics such as determination and perseverance also led to success. All these aspects relate to inner drive, self-image and self-motivation. One of the participants simply said:

Quote FG 4.108:

'You know you just had to.'

As they wished to succeed, three participants prepared for the online module by taking a course in HTML. This course was not part of the master's degree for which they were registered. Taking the course together showed a degree of camaraderie. One of them said:

Quote FG 4.109:

'Three of us, that's me and Karel and Camilla, did an HTML course in April, before this, and it helped tremendously. We were very glad that we did it.'

Some of the participants were convinced that people completed the module because they persevered in their efforts to succeed. The following quotations are relevant:

Quote FG 4.110:

'I think maybe one thing, in the end, say, people that finish, that complete something, are people who don't want to – it's not people who give up. ... They don't give up on anything.'

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Quote FG 4.111:

'Also, by the time you wanted to bail [sic], you've done so much, it's really not worth it. You will not give it up. You will not give it up. You put in too much. Not after doing all of that, I will not give it up and have to do it all again this year.'

Small achievements served as internal motivation, as was described by one of the participants who compared his online experiences to a game of golf:

Quote FG 4.112:

'Yes. You know, if I play golf, and I play eighteen holes, in the first sixteen holes, I play very poor. I hit away twenty balls. Very poor. Then I play one hole excellent, and I get the birdie or something. That made me come back and play golf again next time. That's the way golf is like. So if you sit there and you struggle and struggle for two days or whatever, and then suddenly you get the scroll bar working...it's like a drug. Ja [Yes], it's a reward that you get. But it's not a reward from other people. No, no. It's a reward from yourself. I can do it. The technical thing working – Ja [Yes], I didn't give up the marks or anything I had there.'

Being able to achieve something and show it to her family and friends served as motivation for another participant. The feedback that she received from friends and family served as external motivation. She said:

Quote FG 4.113:

'I think, for me, it was to show my kids what their ma could do. I'm bragging about it. Have a look. Look at this. That's true. ... No, I sent my e-mail of my web site address to a lot of people, so everyone could go and look. It was also about the external feedback that you got back, it was important that it was external. External reward.'

Some of the participants indicated that they had an image to uphold. They wished to comply with the expectations of society with regard to people who were furthering their studies, and wanted to fulfil their functions as role models within their professions.

Quote FG 4.114:

'... jy moet onthou, ons is darem M-studente, né. Jy kan mos nou nie jou "is" en "am's" en "are's" verkeerdom sit nie.'

[Translation]

'... you must remember we are MA students, aren't we? You cannot put your is's and am's and are's the wrong way round.'

Participants also had positive experiences of the online module, and these experiences motivated them to stay on and complete the course.

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4.5.4 Positive descriptions of experience

The participation of students in the synchronous *Interwise* session during the second half of the module was such an experience. It not only motivated individual students, but also served to enhance the dynamic of the group. One participant said:

Quote FG 4.115:

'Ek weet nie of julle dit ook so beleef het nie, maar van die Interwise sessie af, het – dit was so 'n sinchroniese ding wat ons eers nie kon doen het nie – was daar vir my absolute motivering wat uitgekóm het, en die hele groepdinamika.'

[Translation]

'I don't know if you experienced it like that as well, but since the Interwise session – that was a synchronous thing which we couldn't do at first – for me, there was absolute motivation that came to the fore, and the whole group dynamic.'

Another participant echoed this point of view by saying:

Quote FG 4.116:

'Positief, ja, asof daar gemotiveerdheid gekóm het onder die medestudente. Ons het selfs, daarna het ons deur Messenger gesels. Ja, maar daai was nou half 'n turning point.'

[Translation]

'Positive, yes, as if fellow students became motivated. We even, after that we had discussions through Messenger. Yes, but that was kind of a turning point.'

A third participant confirmed the motivating influence of synchronous activities. He said:

Quote FG 4.117:

'So, ek wil amper vir jou sê, van ouens wat 'n mens op 'n natuurlike basis oor die loop van die kursus voorheen al ondersteuning gekry het, het jy nou ondersteuning gekry. En daar was niks lekkerder, soos iemand al gesê het, om drie-uur in die oggend te sit en te weet daar's vier ander ouens ook daar.'

[Translation]

'So, I'm inclined to tell you, from guys who supported you before on a natural basis during the course, (from them) you have now received support. And there was nothing more exciting, as somebody already had said, to be up and about at three o'clock in the morning and to know that four other guys were there as well.'

Maria sent the following e-mail message to the lecturer after the *Interwise* session:

Quote EM 4.51:

The session worked more like a normal classroom with the interaction and communication to express ideas. The feel of listening to the instructor as if she was

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*in the same room was really impressive. This was an experience of a life time [sic] even though there were a few technical problems.
Lovely experience
Maria*

Participants experienced spontaneous support from different sources throughout the module. Although they were divided on the main sources of support, some felt that they received a huge amount of support via the synchronous discussion tool *Yahoo! Messenger*. One participant made the following remark during the second focus group interview:

Quote FG 4.118:

'Kind of a support from your colleagues that came in with the Messenger.'

Another participant also said that they experienced *Yahoo! Messenger* as a supportive environment. He said:

Quote FG 4.119:

'Ek dink jy het tog gevoel die mense support jou.'

[Translation]

'I think though, you felt people supported you.'

One participant found *WebCT* to be helpful with regard to communication. He said:

Quote FG 4.120:

'... totdat ons op WebCT kom, toe dag ek, ah, nou kan ek sien wat ek nie kon sien nie en toe't ek nou soort van 'n tweede asem geskep.'

[Translation]

'... when we were on WebCT, I thought, ah, now I can see what I couldn't see, and then I sort of got a second wind.'

Fellow students, of whom some were also colleagues at work, supported each other. As their programmes did not necessarily synchronise, they could not give academic support, but they supported each other emotionally. The following quotations have reference:

Quote FG 4.121:

'I had nice support, because you know, Hendrik is ... um ... you know, we work in offices next to each other. Moral support, but not – we didn't have any time – we, our programmes didn't synchronise. We never had time to help each other academically, but you know, you could make a remark.'

Hendrik replied to this by saying:

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Quote FG 4.122:

'Yes, yes. And that, I think, you know, kind of bound us together, and that was a support for us. Because my sole support came just purely from my colleagues. From the people I studied with. Nothing and nobody at home knows anything.'

Bob acknowledged that he received support from an anonymous person, but was very secretive about this person. He 'confessed' to 'illegal' behaviour, but rationalised the illegitimacy by saying that it could happen in a normal classroom situation as well. The relevant e-mail message read as follows:

Quote EM 4.52:

*I got a few messages ... under the table, but this was a plus for me ... besides which this happens in a 'normal' classroom as well.
Good points
Bob*

It was possible that Bob received this 'under-the-table' assistance from Gérard who was probably not a member of his tribe. This could be inferred from the following e-mail sent by Gérard:

Quote EM 4.53:

*I loved being able to send messages 'under the table'!!
Gérard*

However, participants received support from not only fellow students (tribe members or members of other tribes) and colleagues but also external sources such as friends and family members. The following examples explain the support given by friends and family.

Rachel said she had a friend in another country, and they had continuous e-mail conversations. Participants had to design websites, and use the FTP function to publish their assignments onto these sites. Her friend could access her site and gave her constant support. She said:

Quote FG 4.123:

'We got support from outside. I used to e-mail my friend back home in (country) constantly. He used to support me.'

Another participant received support from her daughter who helped her type assignments. She commented:

Quote FG 4.124:

'I sometimes used my daughter. ... Ja [Yes], I needed someone to...type fast, because my typing is too slow.'

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This participant also explained that she received further assistance from her daughter who was interested in e-games. Her daughter showed her how to play these games so that she could obtain immunity. She explained as follows:

Quote FG 4.125:

'I got – again – support from my daughter, but because she enjoyed it. What do you call it when you can get immunity? You had to download a game, for example, and I didn't even want to do it, but because she was interested in it; she did it, and she showed me how to do it.'

Another participant told his family that he experienced a huge amount of pressure and that he needed time. They gave him full support. Refer to Quote FG 4.60 (Subsection 4.4.3). One of the participants mentioned that the concern of family members about her health encouraged her to persevere and to complete assignments. She said:

Quote FG 4.126:

'I had flu. The flu developed into pneumonia, and my kids were mad at me, because I was getting up at night. They were telling me: "Ma, you're going to die". But you know, there was no choice. You had to do it ... I did it.'

The extent of support given to participants by the lecturer of the module served as motivating factor.

4.5.5 Feedback from the lecturer

Support from the lecturer was also provided. Participants concurred that it was as if the lecturer was online *'all the time'*. They said:

Quote FG 4.127:

'She was there all the time. She was there all the time. So that she knew what she was doing. It was amazing.'

Quote FG 4.128:

'... sometimes in the evening at eleven or twelve, when you click on your Messenger, and then Linda's also on. She was on all the time, I think. I think she never went off. You will just say: Hello; and then she will say back: Hello, how are you? And that just helps. The fact that you knew she was ... Well, I've written a whole article on Linda's support, so I won't repeat the whole article here.'

The skill showed by the lecturer when she communicated with participants, whether it was related to problems that they experienced or to give moral support, impressed the participants. They felt that she was *'in control all the time'*. One participant specifically mentioned the fact that the lecturer always gave feedback. Another

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participant noted the promptness of the lecturer's reply. The following quotations have reference:

Quote FG 4.129:

'Ja [Yes]. The fact that she always gave feedback. Ja [Yes], and if things went wrong, I don't know how you guys experienced it, I was really studying the text of the messages, and not the 'asking myself how I felt about it'.'

Quote FG 4.130:

'I mean what she was doing, what type of tasks she gave us. She was in control all the time of it [sic].'

The lecturer communicated with the participants individually via e-mail and synchronously via *Yahoo! Messenger*. The following excerpts from e-messages and quotations from focus group transcripts give an overview of the extent of the support given by the lecturer to students. A short description accompanies each quotation or excerpt. One participant described the support given by the lecturer as follows:

Quote FG 4.131:

'Yes, it started off the first week. We did a task, and then she saw us, she handed out a – I can't remember – a bottle of Game or something. And every time you had to do something, then she rewarded you with stuff. And she had all these – what do you call these icons of instant smiles, smiley faces and everything. If she sent you an e-mail [sic], she said well done. I said at one time that I had the highest score. She sent me an e-mail [sic] and said well done Pedro, I'm so proud of you, with a smiley face and whatever. Those kinds of things.'

The following is an example of positive feedback given by Linda to Bob and *Tribe e-Learn-a-long*:

Quote EM 4.54:

*Wow, this is a quite a nice start, Bob and Tribe e-Learn-a-long! Already Anneli has come across a couple of nice freebies. Now get the rest of your tam [sic] to submit some more ...
EGreetings
Linda*

The following e-mail sent by the lecturer to the participants in recognition of their efforts also served as an example of how she supported them online. She wrote:

Quote EM 4.55:

*Linda_van_Ryneveld_sa@y... > wrote:
so far to all of those whose sites are up and running! I recognise the fact that this has been a first for many of you and are so proud of you for getting it in such a short space of time.
Keep up the good work!
L (Linda)*

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A few of the participants noted how promptly the lecturer replied to e-mail messages. One said:

Quote FG 4.132:

'Just you didn't have to wait. Even if you sent her an e-mail, you could know the next time you checked in, you would be a reply [sic].'

The following e-mail conversation indicated how prompt and efficient the lecturer was in replying to Hendrik's e-mail message, which was sent at 12:26. Linda's reply was sent at 12:37, and she systematically answered each of his questions.

Quote EM 4.56:

*From: Linda
Subject: Re: [eLearn2002] Individual Assignment 2
.....ac.za 07/26/02 12:26PM >>>
(Hendrik) Hi our (UP) server/system (???) is up and running again!!!
(Linda) That's great!
(Hendrik) Linda did you post us an update of the (rest) of the assignments??
(Linda) Not yet, I will put them up tomorrow once all the other assignments are in (the cut-off time is 12:00). I think it is fair to give all the tribes the same amount of time.
(Hendrik) What must we do with the URL of our own web site (Individual Assignment 2)?
(Linda) You must mail the address to Elearn2002 so that everyone else can also go and have a look at your masterpiece! One week down, 5 to go!
eGreetings
L*

The lecturer supported the participants by offering assistance when she noted that they were not quite on track. The following e-mail message is proof of such an occasion:

Quote EM 4.57:

*From: Linda
Subject: [Elearn2002] Re: What do we need for Thurs?
Gérard, I am not sure whether you don't understand what is expected of you, or whether you simply haven't read the assignment file that was uploaded to Yahoo Groups last Thursday? If you did read through the assignments that was posted [sic] under 'FILES' in your Elearn2002 Yahoo Group and you still experience problems, you are welcome to e-mail me personally so that I can talk you through the assignments.
This offer stands for all the other 'Survivors' [sic] as well. BUT, please note that time is running out!
EGreetings
Linda*

One participant went so far as to phone the lecturer to ask advice, even though it was against the only-online communication rule. The participant regarded this experience as a positive event. He said:

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Quote FG 4.133:

'Well, I phoned the lecturer once, and asked her: How do you do this? Can you help me? The person who presented the course to us. So I got some subjective support.'

The presence of the lecturer of the module on *Yahoo! Messenger*, especially when the participants were online in the middle of the night, served as a motivational factor. Communication with her was not only experienced as support, but also served as external motivation. One participant said:

Quote FG 4.134:

'I would say that I really got tremendous support from the mentor. We used to talk on the chatterbox thingy... Linda, late at night, you know, it was amazing –'

The above opinion was reiterated by two participants who said:

Quote FG 4.135:

'Ja [Yes], one o'clock, two o'clock at night. Actually that is something that, if she does that again, you know, some of those things wasn't saved [sic], of the talking.'

Quote FG 4.136:

'Ja [yes], that little, on that little box, and I think that out of that you could have got a lot of info. Because really, you know, she helped a lot.'

Although the comment on the lecturer's feedback and support was predominantly positive, two of the participants criticised her support technique, comparing it to a recipe or a ready-to-use product. They said:

Quote FG 4.137:

'But there were really times when it is as if she – if a student say this type of thing, I will say this type of thing. You know, almost like a recipe. I don't know if it's true. I'm not saying that she did that. It could be that –'

Quote FG 4.138:

'Yes. It was supportive, but it was like readily there. Sometimes I got the impression she got them listed. If a student does this, I will do this. I don't know. Maybe that was the job. I don't know. I wouldn't know. It was just an observation that I made, but on a scale, it measured very positively.'

The next example of emotional and cognitive support given by the lecturer contradicts the observations made by the above participants. Gérard and the lecturer had the following synchronous conversation one evening on *Yahoo! Messenger*:

Quote YM 4.1:

*Gérard (08:51:34 PM): Hi how are you? Ready for tomorrow night?
Linda (08:51:59 PM): Hi there! As ready as they get...!
Linda (08:52:10 PM): How are things on your side?*

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Gérard (08:53:09 PM): *Struggling to get things for our tribal assignment!!!! Only Sanet has given me anything!*

Linda (08:53:52 PM): *I notice that those who 'master' the website has an added responsibility in this regard*

Linda (08:54:46 PM): *I'll keep that in mind (just so you know, ;))*

Gérard (08:55:26 PM): *Thanks a lot!*

Linda (08:55:26 PM): *I see your test with (facilitator of the Interwise session) went ok.*

Linda (08:55:44 PM): *Are you confident with the tools in Interwise?*

Gérard (08:56:15 PM): *Yes, thought bandwidth would be a problem - NO Way!*

Linda (08:56:14 PM): *We'll play around a bit tomorrow evening*

Linda (08:56:18 PM): *Don*

Gérard (08:56:55 PM): *Yes*

Linda (08:56:31 PM): *Oops, fingers slipped*

Linda (08:57:05 PM): *Don't worry too much, it's really all about getting hands-on experience*

Linda (08:57:32 PM): *If things do go wrong (and something is bound to!) we'll learn from that as well*

Gérard (08:58:12 PM): *Yip, am really [sic] enjoying this module!*

Linda (08:58:54 PM): *Good! That's the idea, even though I realise that it must be stressful even to guys like yourself with a solid Internet background*

Gérard (08:59:58 PM): *A 90 degree learning curve!*

Linda (08:59:47 PM): *Then I'm happy!*

Gérard (09:00:19 PM): *Bye*

Linda (09:00:06 PM): *bye, and good luck tomorrow evening!*

One of the participants, Gérard, who according to the lecturer had a solid Internet background, described the online module as a '90-degree learning curve'. This indicated how demanding the *CyberSurviver* module really was. Despite the support received from fellow students, family, friends, and the lecturer, participants had negative experiences of the module as a competition.

4.5.6 Negative experience of module not being a game

Participants believed that the competition format of the *CyberSurviver* module and the voting procedures had a negative effect on the attainment of skills and good marks, which they regarded as priorities. They felt that less skilled participants would have done better if the module was not presented in the format of a game. Hendrik said:

Quote FG 4.139:

'Ek dink die swakkeres sou beter gedoen het as dit nie n speletjie was nie, as ons in ons tribes gebly het die heelyd, en as dit 'n kompetisie onder die spanne was, en nie spanlede onder mekaar nie. Die afstem, dink ek, het 'n baie negatiewe effek gehad. Jy kon dit agterkom aan die – jy kon tussen die lyne lees. Die mense voel nie lekker nie. Ek sou nie lekker gevoel het as ek afgestem was nie. Jy's tog 'n mens. Jy vat dit persoonlik.'

[Translation]

'I think those who did poorly would have done better if it wasn't a game, if we stayed in tribes all the time, and if it was a competition between tribes and not between tribe members. Voting out people, I think, had a very negative impact. It was noticeable in – you could read it between the lines. The people did not take it

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well. I also wouldn't take it well if I was voted out. You're only human. You take it personally.'

Pedro, who won the game, supported Hendrik's viewpoint by saying that the ultimate aim was to master the necessary skills and to achieve good marks. He worked hard from the beginning, not only to win but also to do well. The information about a prize was only given after the game had begun. Even though he enjoyed the prize, he held the opinion that he had worked hard to achieve the outcomes of the module and to receive good marks. He said:

Quote FG 4.140:

'Ek wil net sê dis waar ek saam met Hendrik wil stem, want op die ou end het dit gegaan oor punte. Vir my. Ek het hierdie hele ding gewen, en ek was weg vir 'n naweek, jippiekajy!, maar ek moet nou eerlik vir julle sê, nie vir een sekonde het ek gedink ek doen dit nou om die naweek te wen nie. Ek het gedink ek doen dit nou om goeie punte te kry. After all, ja, hulle het eers later gesê ons kan iets wen met hierdie storie, maar dis ook hoekom... Dit gaan oor punte. Op die ou einde gaan dit oor punte. Hierdie is 'n module wat jy moet afhandel, wat jy moet weet...'

[Translation]

'I just want to say this is where I agree with Hendrik, because in the end it was about marks. For me, I won this whole thing, and I went away for a weekend, hip, hip, hurrah! But honestly, I can tell you, I did not think for one second that I was doing it to win the weekend. I thought I did it to get good marks. After all, yes, they only told us later on that we could win something with this story, but that is also why... It is about marks. In the end, it's about marks. This is a module that you must complete, what you should know....'

A second participant noted that learning was painful, as the module was less than a game and more like a competition. He stated that he really wanted to do well. He said:

Quote FG 4.141:

'Painful learning. It was no game. You know that, hey. It was no game. It was like a competition. Because I'm one of those people: when there's something up for grabs, I really want to do well, and hope that maybe in the end, maybe you'll just ... survive and win the game. So, in the beginning I thought that the guys or people who know, or who don't know those things, are going to be voted off in the first week or two. But some way I survived, and in the end when there were only what four, five, six left, then you – maybe it gets close – so maybe you can wait.'

A third participant reiterated the importance of grades. The participant stated:

Quote FG 4.142:

'And the fact that it's my marks. I really wanted to do well. I carried on in spite of the fact that it was a competition.'

The following quotation explains a participant's experience of the module as not being a game only, and the negative and positive aspects associated with it. The relation

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between the reality television game show *Survivor* and the module *CyberSurviver* is apparent in this summary given by a participant during a focus group interview:

Quote FG 4.143:

'Nee, weet jy, ek het toevallig nou hierdie Survivor Thailand nou gevolg hierdie laaste ruk, en nou dat ek die hele tyd hier gesit en luister het wat hulle alles gesê het, en deur my gedagtes weer recall het alles van verlede jaar se storietjie, die oomblik wat mense in interaksie met mekaar is, en hulle skuur teen mekaar, is daar sekere emosies en sparks wat gebeur. So alles wat, vir my, wat ek nou weer op Survivor Thailand gesien het, van agteraf collaborate, en agteraf gesels oor dinge, emosies wat jy beleef as jy gewen het... al daai tipe goed is alles goed wat ek nou weer gesien en gehoor en beleef het. Ek stem met al daai goed saam wat hulle genoem het: die up's en down's en wanneer jy iets reggekry het, maar ek bedoel dit is maar net so. Wanneer jy kommunikeer en jy's afhanklik van mekaar, en daar's iets waarvoor jy werk, en daar's geld betrokke, dan, outomaties is al hierdie emosies betrokke. Jy werk in die eerste plek vir jouself. Ek dink dit is nogal bepaald van die eerste twee, drie weke. Dit wat Barbara ook daar sê het ek ook gevoel, die eerste ruk het dit gegaan oor survive, en as jy nie kon survive of wat nie, dan het dit dalk vir jou gevoel maar iemand stem jou af, en hulle het dalk iets teen jou, of wat ookal. Maar dit het nie daaroor gegaan nie. Dis soos ek dit maar gesien het. Almal het maar ge-survive. Dit het maar later bymekaar gekom dat ons met die Messenger en alles, met mekaar kon begin kommunikeer het, en omdat mens sien maar jy sukkel met iets, en 'n ander ou help jou uit daai slootjie, dan voel jy soos 'n span.'

[Translation]

'No, you know, quite by chance I watched this Survivor Thailand the last few weeks. And now that I have sat here the whole time, and I have listened to what they had to say, I recall in my mind everything about last year's little story - the moment that people interact and they rub each other the wrong way, there are certain emotions and sparks that fly. So, all that, for me, that I've seen now again on Survivor Thailand, of working together behind the back, of talking about things behind the back, emotions that you experience if you win ... all those sort of things are things that I now have seen and heard and experienced again. I agree with all those things that they have mentioned: the ups and downs, and when you succeeded in doing something, but I mean, it is just the way it is. When you communicate and you are dependent on each other, and there's something to work for, and there's money involved, then, automatically all these emotions are involved. In the first place, you work for yourself. I think this was definitely (the case) in the first two, three weeks. That what Barbara said, I also felt, the first few weeks were all about survival, and if you couldn't survive, or what not, you might have felt that somebody was voting you off, or they had something against you, or whatever. But it wasn't about that. This is how I see it. Everybody was just surviving. Only later on did things come together, with Messenger and all, that we could start communicating with one another, and because you realise that you are struggling with something, and somebody helps you out, you feel like a team.'

From the above quotations, it could be inferred that participation in *CyberSurviver* had both positive and negative consequences and results. On the one hand, participants experienced learning as 'painful', as the competition aspect of the module elicited emotions that could be described as 'sparks'. On the other hand, positive experiences such as interaction, interdependence, communication, support, a feeling of belonging, and teamwork came to the fore. In the next section, all these aspects will be discussed in the context of literature that was obtained about virtual groups and online learning.

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4.6 Literature control

4.6.1 Altruism and individualism

The quotes in this chapter relate as follows to the discussion on altruism and individualism:

- ☉ Quotes FG 4.1 to FG 4.8 and EM 4.1 pertain to participants' fear of failing and disappointing group members. The relevant quotes also refer to the selfish behaviour of some of the participants (including feelings of guilt about selfish behaviour) and assistance given to group members.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.9 to FG 4.11 pertain to feelings experienced by participants with regard to group identification.
- ☉ Quote FG 4.12 and Quotes EM 4.2 to EM 4.12 dealt with the support that participants gave each other.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.13 to FG 4.29, as well as EM 4.13 to EM 4.17, pertain to the risk-taking behaviour of participants.

Altruism and individualism as personal philosophies are fields of study in their own right. Because of the nature of this research, a broad discussion on these philosophies is not feasible. However, each philosophy will be discussed briefly to enable the reader to achieve a sense of perspective with regard to the participants' affective experiences as they relate to altruistic or individualistic behaviour.

Altruism and individualism are distinctly different. Altruists are dependent on the combined thinking of all as a group. Individualists see thinking as best done by the individual. Altruism preaches selflessness as a virtue; individualism shows strengths in selfishness.

In 1851, the French philosopher Auguste Comte coined the word *altruism* as '*self-sacrifice for the benefit of others*' (Altruists International [Sa]). It entered the English language in 1853. Comte's ethical system, in which the only moral acts were those intended to promote the happiness of others, was considered by many to be rather extreme. As a result, the following meaning evolved: *loving others as oneself* (Altruists International [Sa]).

Currently, scientists, who explore how unselfish behaviour could have evolved, use another meaning for the word *altruism*. These scientists explain that altruism is a philosophy '*...that promotes the survival chances of others at a cost to one's own*'.

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Altruists are happy when others thrive, and sad when others suffer (Altruists International [Sa]).

There are, however, cynics who say that altruism is just another form of selfishness (Wood 2001). Wood mentions the following argument held by some cynics:

'We do good, at best, in order to enjoy an enlightened sense of our own goodness, and at worst, because helping others makes us feel superior.'

According to Wood (2001), cynics also say there is no such thing as selfless action. These cynics are of the opinion that, as a society, people are torn between contradictory values: their responsibility FOR each other versus their responsibility TO each other' (Wood 2001).

Individualism *'holds that every person is an end in himself and that no person should be sacrificed for the sake of another'* (Stata 1992). Individualists argue that their actions produce emotional rewards within themselves, so they have selfish reasons to perform them. In altruists, the egoistic impulse is much stronger than the altruistic impulse. The following quote indicates the 'rebellious' nature of individualists:

'An individualist is a man who says: "I will not run anyone's life - nor let anyone run mine. I will not rule or be ruled. I will not be a master nor a slave. I will not sacrifice myself to anyone - nor sacrifice anyone to myself' (Rand 1946).

It is the personal belief of the researcher that devotion (personal commitment) and support of others will lead to personal achievements. The researcher believes that, by devoting one's life to accomplish the most one can and by supporting the achievements of others, one will add to the realisation of one's own achievements. By doing this, one will adhere to natural motivation, and have a cause that is bigger than oneself. Eventually, devotion and the achievement of greatness will reward the individual.

I am of the opinion that altruism and individualism are natural 'genetic' traits that are present in all human beings, to different degrees. With reference to the participants in this study, these traits began to surface when they were required to function in a group. It could be suspected that some students had thoughts (however 'pure') with regard to how much they would benefit from helping or supporting another group

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member. These probably depended on how important they valued the act of caring and helping, how much they believed this act may create positive perceptions about themselves, and whether they believed that their group members will in turn help them when they needed it.

In her research report, Stacey (1999) explained that the expectation of the group with regard to the individual's contribution strongly motivated group members to apply themselves to collaborate online. She believes that people become more responsible when they realise that others are depending on them. Stacey quotes one of her students to affirm her finding:

'You've got demands on you to get in there and look and to keep yourself up to date with what's happening.' (Stacey 1999).

Anonymity was not considered with regard to the *CyberSurviver* module. Although this module was presented online (and not face-to-face), the participants knew each other before the game commenced. This 'factor of familiarity' may have contributed to the fear that some participants had (due to their perceived lack of knowledge and skill) of disappointing their peers. In the context of the discussion on altruism and individualism, the fear of disappointing group members, selfish behaviour, and feelings of guilt about selfish behaviour could be seen as normal human behaviour.

Students were divided into groups and had to work together as the game required. The design of the module (game) was such that students had no choice but to collaborate with team members. Groups consist of individuals with unique personalities, needs, abilities, and self-esteem, and each individual brings to the group a unique complexity in terms of needs, skills, and styles. Factors such as the environment, individual members, the size of the group, and its purpose influence both individual and collective behaviour simultaneously (Wood, Phillips & Pedersen 1996). All the aforementioned characteristics applied to the *CyberSurviver* groups. These groups had collective goals, and the success of each group depended upon the success of its members (Buher & Walbert 2004). Thus, the common purpose of each group distinguished them from individuals who merely got together (Samovar *et al.* 1996).

According to Smith (2002), '*...virtual teams have become the vehicle through which group work is accomplished in distance learning environments*'. In *CyberSurviver*, group work created opportunities for participants to socialise, belong, and to co-

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construct new knowledge. Knowledge was generated and participants shared information. Participants with various skills and perspectives worked together to produce results (see Quotes FG 4.3 and FG 4.5). Individuals relied on each other to accomplish common objectives, as explained by Smith (2002). The *CyberSurviver* challenges were complicated, because participants had to communicate, trust each other and meet deadlines, and then they had to get rid of a group member by voting her/him out. The voting requirement evoked contrasting feelings with regard to group cohesion and loyalty to individuals in the group. (Refer to Quotes FG 4.3, FG 4.5, FG 4.10 and FG 4.11, as well as Quote TM 4.1).

Differences in attitude and personality of group members are evident when quotes are read. Some of the *CyberSurviver* participants exhibited functional, cooperative and selfless behaviour (Quotes FG 4.12, EM 4.3, EM 4.6, EM 4.8, EM 4.9, EM 4.11), while others displayed dysfunctional, competitive, and self-serving behaviour (Quotes FG 4.1, FG 4.2, FG 4.4, FG 4.5, FG 4.7). Similar findings were reported by Samovar *et al.* (1996).

Different authors hold different views with regard to the type of group that functions best: homogeneous or heterogeneous (Anson & Dannels ([Sa]); Flowers & Ritz 1994; Schniedewind & Davidson 2000). The *CyberSurviver* lecturer divided the participants into groups according to their Internet skills (mixed abilities), as explained in Subsection 3.3.1. The following quote from Van Ryneveld (the lecturer) explains how the participants were divided into groups:

'I ... divided the people in the room into 4 groups of 6 members each. The learners were asked to locate themselves on an imaginary straight line (continuum), one end of which represented a thorough working knowledge of the Internet, while the other end represented complete ignorance and unfamiliarity of the Internet. They were then numbered in sets of 1 to 4. After that we grouped all the ones, and then all the twos, and so on until the last person, together. The newly formed groups were then asked to come up with a unique tribal name and slogan with which to identify themselves.' (Van Ryneveld 2004:139).

CyberSurviver group members also differed with respect to age, race and gender, making the groups extremely heterogeneous. This diversity had a huge impact on the functioning of the groups. The effect of the heterogeneous composition of the group

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on the participants can be envisaged by reading the following quote from Van Ryneveld's study with regard to the allocation of people (in general) into groups.

'People in everyday life make decisions about what groups they would like to join. If they support a cause that is advocated by a particular group, they might seek to join that group. In such circumstances, membership might be both profitable and logical for them because they perceive the group to be compatible with their ideals and purposes.' (Van Ryneveld 2004:191).

According to Samovar *et al.* (1996), it is shared commitment that results in the development of group norms or standards. The lecturer enforced the rule of no face-to-face communication. Regardless of the lecturer's didactic intentions, the students were not part of that decision. They did not partake in any decision with regard to rule making. As nearly all the students broke the only-online communication rule (see Quotes FG 4.13 to FG 4.16 and Quotes EM 4.14, EM 4.20 and EM 4.23), breaking of this rule may be viewed as an aspect of shared commitment, as well as evidence of risk-taking behaviour and an attempt to 'survive'.

Felder and Brent (1994) are however of the opinion that, in groups composed of members with diverse abilities, less skilled students may gain from observing the problem-solving skills of more competent students. The stronger student may also gain a deeper understanding of the subject by explaining aspects to their peers. Deeper understanding by the *CyberSurviver* participants undoubtedly took place, if one considers the large number of e-mail messages that was sent to offer assistance when it was requested. The researcher infers that 'selfishness' (with reference to not giving assistance) was rather due to not being able to help, or believing that one did not have the skill to assist.

According to Myers (2003), a sense of belonging develops when you identify with another person or organisation, or perhaps a species, culture, or ethnic group. In the context of this study, participants had developed a sense of belonging, if they felt that they were part of a *CyberSurviver* group. Picciano (2002) stated that interaction and the feeling of belonging were two different experiences. It was indeed possible for a student to interact by means of e-mail or by posting messages on a bulletin board without feeling part of the group. This could explain why participants went 'missing', and were looked for by group leaders who sent e-mail messages to their peers and the lecturer in that regard.

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Participants eventually did develop a feeling of belonging, as was apparent from e-communication that included requests for and offers of support (see Quotes FG 4.9 to FG 4.12, as well as Quotes EM 4.3, EM 4.4, EM 4.8 and EM 4.9). Stacey (1999) stated that, if a student embarking on an online course were seeking help, the group would be the starting point. She gave an example of a student (Sarah) who evoked support by explaining her understanding of something in e-mail messages to her peers. Stacey quoted Sarah as follows:

'Oh, it always helps me to tell them what I think, then they can sort of say "well no that's not right" Ã... or else just giving you support along the way.'
Stacey (1999).

Stacey (1999) also remarked that the humorous and informal approach to solving technical problems collaboratively set the tone for the group's interaction. Stacey included the following quote as evidence that humour enhanced group interaction:

Posted By: Perry

Title: Re "surprise Ã... economics!!"

Congratulations Jill you have finally made it into the electronic superhighway!! Watch out there are many false turn offs!!!

I agree with the following statement made by Cameron (2000):

'The success of a group depends on the individual members accepting and applying the rules, and by so doing fulfils [sic] the responsibilities expected with [sic] them'.

However, I could not find evidence of any research project prohibiting students from meeting face-to-face or making telephonic contact while they were doing an online course. The only-online communication rule, laid down by the lecturer of the *CyberSurviver* module/game, was, as far as the researcher could establish, unique. The students, therefore, had to meet unique challenges. This situation could have led to risk-taking behaviour. Tu (2002:300) indicated that online students exhibited risk-taking behaviour because they felt they had nothing to lose, if they were discovered.

Connecting online socially is important, as it assists in the creation of social presence (a degree of interpersonal contact) (Gunawardena & Zittle 1997). Aragon (2003) states that the ability to make interpersonal contact (online) decreases due to the

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electronic nature of online interaction, the physical or geographical separation of online students, and isolated working conditions.

Educational practitioners rate learner-learner interaction as the most important form of interaction in an online course. This is followed by learner-facilitator interaction (Muirhead 2001; Soo & Bonk 1998). Research also confirms that students need to connect with each other in the online environment (Atack & Rankin 2002; Soo & Bonk 1998; Swan 2001). The abovementioned authors do not specify that the interaction should be face-to-face.

Thurmond, Wambach, Connors and Frey (2002:179) reported that some students were dissatisfied with a course, as they were expected to participate in teams/group projects in an e-learning environment. Thurmond *et al.* (2002:183) were of the opinion that completing course assignments without any face-to-face contact might have been the reason for the dissatisfaction. This point of view is reiterated by Gabriel (2004:68) who suggests that face-to-face communication may play an important role in making online groups more effective.

It seemed that participants in the *CyberSurviver* module had broken the only-online communication rule for selfish reasons. However, whether their behaviour was altruistic or individualistic, it benefitted all the members of the different groups. Participants felt that they could comply with the demands of the course and achieve its outcomes, only if they could phone and/or visit each other. It appeared that they had found the online communication inadequate to attain their goals. I made this assumption based on the limitations of text-based communication with respect to non-verbal communication. Text-based communication, including online communication, is less responsive than face-to-face communication; therefore, it possibly inhibits expression and eliminates non-verbal communication (McDonald 2002:14). Refer to Quotes Em 4.14 and Em 4.17, as well as FG 4.15, FG 4.20, FG 4.23, FG 4.24 and FG 4.28.

The *CyberSurviver* lecturer knew that the participants did not adhere to the only-online communication rule, but she realised that breaking the rule was to the benefit of the students. She wrote:

'Throughout the module, I was aware of the fact that the learners had not stuck to our agreement that they would use only the online communication tools for their discussions about the module. ... I personally had no a (sic)

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problem with them seeking closer contact. In fact, I appreciated the commitment that they brought to their assignments. I was also convinced by that time that they were fully experiencing the realities of being online learners, which was after all one of the main aims of this module. Because I could see that the learners desperately needed this kind of officially illicit contact and the technical support that it provided, I only reprimanded them jokingly (when at all) and never banned other kinds of communication with any degree of vehemence.' (Van Ryneveld 2004:204).

The following cluster in the category *Curative Factors* is *Communication*.

4.6.2 Communication

The following quotes relate to the discussion on communication:

- ☉ Quotes FG 4.30 to FG 4.36, EM 4.18 and EM 4.19 pertain to the feeling of loneliness experienced by the participants.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.37 to FG 4.52 and EM 4.20 deal with synchronous and asynchronous communication that took place during the *CyberSurviver* module.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.53 to FG 4.62 and EM 4.21 relate to the coping experiences of the participants.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.63 to FG 4.67 and EM 4.22 pertain to experiences with regard to language.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.68 to FG 4.79 and EM 4.23 to EM 4.28 relate to the positive and negative emotions of participants.

In online groups, communication does not take place without difficulty. Students find it difficult to engage in spontaneous written communication (Smith 2002). Wegerif (1998) confirms this viewpoint by quoting a study respondent on written communication:

'Writing does not come easily to me. I don't enjoy it. I find it easier to speak. And reading on screen is difficult; it is harder to get the real point than for printed text.'

Online communication requires that users possess some level of computer communication literacy, such as typing, reading, and writing. If users lack these skills,

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communication anxiety will develop. Tu (2002:296) therefore suggests that students be introduced to some form of text-based communication, such as casual topics, to ensure the success of collaborative learning.

Multiple modes of communication are used in a face-to-face situation. These modes include voice tone, voice volume, eye movement, facial expressions, hand gestures and other body language. These cues provide for a methodical communication process. By using these modes of communication, taking in a conversation is facilitated, subtle meanings are conveyed, and feedback is provided. Online communication limits the normal give-and-take of discussion (Smith 2002). This is reiterated by Cathcart, Samovar and Henman (1996) who are of the opinion that the existence of face-to-face elements in groups is challenged by the possibilities for online interactions. With regard to peer interaction, Burge (1994) states that the absence of visual and aural cues is a specific weakness of online communication (Quotes FG 4.39 and FG 4.41). He quoted a respondent who said:

'I don't have these warm bodies around ...that I ...can look at the person's eyes and see if they really mean what they're saying' (Burge 1994).

Further weaknesses of online communication are loneliness, alienation and isolation, with accompanying anxiety (Burge 1994; Galusha 1997). Hara and Kling (2000) state that the convenience of online learning often leads to students experiencing a huge amount of stress. Students are isolated, and get lonely, as they tend to work at different times and in different places. Abrahamson (1998:37), as well as Palloff and Pratt (2000), is of the opinion that collaborative projects may decrease the feeling of isolation, and increase a sense of a learning community in an online classroom.

When considering Quotes FG 4.30 to FG 4.35, it seemed that the *CyberSurviver* participants had initially experienced an increase in feelings of loneliness and isolation. The possibility of a decrease in feelings of loneliness and isolation is confirmed by DeWert *et al.* (2003:315) who state that their study participants reported diminished feelings of isolation and helplessness owing to collaborative projects and the use of online communication that provided them with much needed emotional support and encouragement. The *CyberSurvivers* had similar experiences (refer to Quotes FG 4.10, FG 4.11 and FG 4.30).

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According to Stelzer and Vogelzangs [Sa], isolation has two dimensions:

- ☉ Physiological dimension (distance in place - being alone); and
- ☉ Psychological dimension (distance in thoughts - feeling alone).

Stelzer and Vogelzangs ([Sa]) explain that *'the basic problem of online learning is the psychological dimension as a result of the physiological dimension'*. Direct communication with the lecturer and peers does not take place. Hara and Kling ([Sa]) indicated the confusion of one of their participants in this regard, quoting her/him with reference to an e-mail message received from the lecturer. The student said:

'I agree with her, but I am not sure if I should send a message saying, "I agree." That's the problem with this e-mail. If this is the classroom, you can just nod your head to show your agreement. I am not always sure that if I am contributing enough or not. ... In fact, I haven't gotten any feedback about my contribution. I cannot tell from the e-mail. You can tell from the classroom what the professor thinks about you from the body language and the way they talk. So, I am not feeling that I'm getting enough assessment.'

[My emphasis]

Similar situations could result in misunderstandings and a lack of social communication. However, according to McDonald (2002:13), online education *'supports interactive group communication with all its social, affective, and cognitive benefits'*. She says that lecturers with years of experience in classrooms report that online learning encourages high quality interaction and sharing. Peters (2001) is of the opinion that the distance learning environment provides more opportunities for interaction with the lecturer than traditional courses.

According to McDonald (2002:14), students may be hesitant to make their ideas, experiences, and feelings known in print. In addition, online students may even fail to pay attention to emotional aspects. This may lead to confusion (see Quote FG 4.57) and a large number of negative comments that may be difficult to resolve in a virtual environment (Smith 2002). Wegerif (1998) quotes a participant in this regard:

'It is a cold medium. Unlike face-to-face (sic) communication you get no instant feedback. You don't know how people responded to your comments; they just go out into silence. This feels isolating and unnerving. It is not warm and supportive.'

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CyberSurviver participants had similar experiences. (Refer to Quotes FG 4.36, FG 4.37 and FG 4.41 to FG 4.45.) Stacey (1999) found that supportive comments posted by students, as well as sharing of personal anecdotes and information, proved to serve as a network of social interaction that *'underlay the mutual respect and trust needed for a successful collaborative group process'*. This type of communication seemed to help students develop a sense of belonging. Stacey (1999) noted that most of the students interviewed expressed comments such as the following:

'It makes you feel there's someone else there, and you're not sort of sitting all alone out away from contact with other people.'

Gabriel (2004:63) quoted a participant on the support she experienced by reading e-mail messages/e-conversations between group members. This quote is very similar to Quote FG 4.58. Gabriel's participant said:

'I found that just reading what other people had to say.... helped with what I wanted to contribute as well ... people have such good ideas, and you don't realize them until you hear them or see them, I guess in this case ... You just get to hear (sic) the other people's opinions and things you don't think of until you hear them, and then you think, "Oops, why didn't I think of that? That's great," you know!' (Gabriel 2004:63).

With regard to some of the *CyberSurviver* participants, it seemed that their lack of knowledge and skill with respect to software and the Internet might have added to their feeling isolated within the game. Their limited knowledge and skills might have prevented them from participating sufficiently in discussions, or even contributing to group assignments, and this again might have led to feelings of loneliness and alienation, as well as anxiety and stress.

According to King (2002:160), anxiety generally manifests in first-time distance education students and dissipates as the course progresses. As opposed to King, Hara and Kling (2000) found that feelings of distress, such as frustration, anxiety and confusion, seemed to be pervasive. They stated that these feelings were experienced, regardless of the fact that students supported each other or developed a sufficient sense of social presence.

Tu (2002:294) quotes Tu and McIsaac (2002) who define social presence in the online learning environment as *'...the degree of feeling, perception, and reaction of being*

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connected on CMC to another intellectual entity'. Tu (2002:294) states that learner characteristics, learners' perceptions of online environments, attributes of communication media, learners' computer literacy, and the use of emoticons and paralanguage are some of the factors that contribute to an appreciable degree of online social presence. According to Tu (2002:294), social presence should be viewed as a subjective quality that depends upon the objective quality of the medium. A respondent's subjective point of view, and a positive experience, is apparent from the following quote:

'For the small part that I played in the group, I found it very interesting and stimulating' (Woods and Baker 2004).

Some online support communities overcome barriers of time and distance and offer advantages of convenience and flexibility because communication can occur at any time and from any place (DeWert *et al.* 2003:312). Students overcome the barriers to such an extent that they express feelings of missing the interaction when they have completed their courses. Gabriel (2004:63) quoted a student who used words quite similar to those in Quote FG 4.78. Gabriel's student said:

'One of the nicest things for me in taking my master's is that interaction, ... and having a conversation and talking about ideas or concepts... And I missed it' (Gabriel 2004:63).

The experiences of students in the online environment are cause for a myriad of feelings/emotions. Most lecturers and authors recognise and accept the crucial role of affect in learning. Picard, Papert, Bender, Blumberg, Breazeal, Cavallo, Machover, Resnick, Roy and Strohecker (2004:253) acknowledge that leading theorists of the cognitive scientific revolution, such as Simon (1967) and Norman (1981), have called for greater representation of affect. Picard *et al.* (2004:253) are however of the opinion that *'the extension of cognitive theory to explain and exploit the role of affect in learning is at best in its infancy'*.

Theories on computer education tend to favour the 'cognitive' over the 'affective', and thinking and learning are viewed as information processing, while affect is ignored (Picard *et al.* 2004:253). The fact that it is difficult to measure information on the affective state is a possible reason for this state of affairs. It is easy to measure someone's ability to recall a list of items or to generalise and apply knowledge. It is

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however much more difficult to measure how a person feels during the period that s/he provides evidence of knowledge and skill (Picard *et al.* 2004:255).

Learning is associated with positive and negative emotions. Learners experience feelings, such as confusion, despair, and frustration, when problems are encountered. On the other hand, when everything is going smoothly, curiosity, fascination and intrigue are experienced. Emotions such as enthusiasm, delight, and amazement are desirable feelings, while awe, wonder, and enlightenment (the aha! moment – the epiphany or revelation as everything becomes clear) are the extreme positive emotions (Kort & Reilly 2002a:57).

In this study, participants were requested to describe the feelings (emotions) that they experienced while they were doing the *CyberSurviver* module. Their feelings coincided with the different phases of development, described in Chapter 5. Their feelings could not be measured but, through data analysis and the interpretation of data, inferences could be drawn.

The participants experienced emotional highs and lows. While they desired to further their qualifications and expertise (probably a main reason for registering for the online course), they encountered problems, such as information overload, time constraints and prescribed communication modes, which caused anxiety and stress. The combination of pressure (leading to affective experiences) and cognitive expectations (to know, analyse, and decide) cause confusion and uncertainties (affective behaviours) in learners, sometimes to such an extent that an individual may decide to quit, or resist (affective behaviours) information seeking (Nahl 2001).

Anxiety may act as a filter that prevents students from mastering a subject. In higher education, the focus on cognitive skills in learning discourages researchers, educators and learners to routinely translate common sense knowledge into spheres of learning. If more attention is given to the affective dimension, it will serve as recognition that no subject is anxiety safe (Cousin & Davidson [Sa]). The *CyberSurvivers* mentioned that they were thrown in at the deep end. They felt unprepared and incompetent, and these feelings probably contributed to their anxiety.

According to Tu (2002:296), '*online communication is concerned with the attributes of the language used online and the applications of online language*'. Wegerif (1998) found that students felt alienated, as the course '*was dominated by a group that spoke a different language*'. The students involved in Wegerif's course came from

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different backgrounds. He acknowledges that diversity may always be a problem, but suggests that the creation of a strong sense of community will help students overcome their fears. The majority of the participants in the *CyberSurviver* module managed to accommodate their peers by communicating in English. The Afrikaans speaking students undoubtedly had the opportunity to speak Afrikaans when they phoned and/or visited each other.

With regard to language, Lu (1998) states that if parents and children do not speak a common language, their communication will often be limited to '*the basic necessities, preventing parents from transmitting to their children the complex set of values, beliefs, wisdom, and understanding*'. This may also relate to communication between lecturers and online students, and online students who participate in collaborative learning. If these students are not able to communicate with each other and their lecturer in a language that they all understand and speak, their cognitive and affective development will suffer.

Stacey (1999) stated that participants admitted fear of posting written messages to the group in a language other than their mother tongue. According to Hara and Kling ([Sa]), the online environment can become '*experiences of frustration*' to students who have a limited knowledge of English. They noted that one of the participants dealt with this problem by communicating with one of her peers who spoke the same first language. Although the *CyberSurvivers* used English as the common language when they communicated online, they preferred their mother tongue to English when they visited or phoned each other.

Ball (2003) is of the opinion that second language English speakers find each other just as intelligible as they find first language English speakers. He gives the example of a Korean who might find it easier to follow the English spoken by a fellow citizen than would a native speaker of English. The reason for this being that they share a phonetic vocabulary, while a foreign accent may hinder comprehension. However, this example refers to interpersonal (face-to-face) communication. During the *CyberSurviver* module, the participants (mostly native speakers of Afrikaans) had to communicate in text. Their anxiety with regard to English might have been due to a lack of vocabulary. Another reason might be that they were not yet skilled in using subject terminology (the terminology relating to computer software and online learning).

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4.6.3 Internal Drive and Value System

The following quotes relate to the discussion on internal drive and value system:

- ☉ Quotes FG 4.80 to FG 4.82 pertain to coping.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.83 to FG 4.91 and EM 4.29 to EM 4.39 pertain to negative emotions, such as feeling agitated.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.92 to FG 4.106 and EM 4.40 to EM 4.50 relate to feeling threatened and exposed.
- ☉ Quote FG 4.107 to FG 4.114 deal with self-image.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.115 to FG 4.126 and EM 4.52 to EM 4.53 represent the positive experiences of participants.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.127 to FG 4.138, EM 4.54 to EM 4.57 and YM 4.1 relate to the experiences of participants with regard to feedback from the lecturer.
- ☉ Quotes FG 4.139 to FG 4.143 pertain to the participants' experiences of the module not being a game.

In the past, theoretical models of higher education theorised that a student's decision to persist is largely based on previous behaviour, attitudes, and norms that drive behaviour through the formation of intent to learn. Volition is described as '*a psychological state characterized by thoughts about the implementation of goals into action and ... self-regulation in the context of persistence*' (Rovai 2003:3).

According to Laschtuwka (2003), online learning requires self-motivation and independence, as well as a personal and deeply felt desire to learn. This is called *intrinsic motivation*. However, online learning also requires rewards, such as a promotion. This is called *extrinsic motivation*. Malone and Lepper (1987) are of the opinion that intrinsic motivation is created by four qualities: challenge, curiosity, control and fantasy. Students tend to want to do tasks that seem challenging. The outcomes set for participants in the *CyberSurviver* module were certainly challenging. Their motivation was sustained because they felt they were making acceptable progress, and felt satisfied about their progress. This is evident in the discussion on the developmental process that the participants experienced (refer to Chapter 5).

The lecturer of the *CyberSurviver* module kept the participants curious throughout the 'game', as she provided them continuously with small challenges (learning opportunities) that made their learning experiences interesting. The participants took control of the learning situation by exhibiting risk-taking behaviour, as discussed in

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this chapter. The nature of the *CyberSurviver* module, being a game, created ample opportunity for participants to create mental images or experience fantasy.

Chyung (2001) believes that adult learners are goal-oriented. Educators should therefore create online learning environments in which adult learners can achieve their goals. Unfortunately, even in the best learning environment, frustrations with regard to technological problems may arise. King (2002:160) is of the opinion that this will be a continuing problem. Gabriel (2004:65) agrees, stating that participants in a study reported frustration with the process of online learning, technology crashes, and learning course content (Refer to Quote EM 4.35 and Quotes FG 4.83 to FG 4.89).

Hara and Kling (1999) found that some students freely expressed their anxiety and frustration with a course in e-mail messages. They quoted the following messages that were posted on separate days:

I have spent one hour trying to follow your directions. I am getting an error message. The first time I tried to download it as a zip file, the error says, cannot access this file. I am getting extremely frustrated :((Hara & Kling 1999).

This computer is very frustrating. I would imagine it is like sitting in a class and only understanding some of what was said, then asked to answer a question. I have felt it ... panic ... isolation ... frustration ... anger. This has been a very good lesson. I will keep trying (Hara and Kling 1999).

Not only do some students experience anxiety during online learning, but they may also find it difficult to interact online. Woods and Baker (2004) reported that students expressed a certain level of comfort in their small-group audience, but described feelings of inhibition when they had to interact within a larger group. (Regarding *CyberSurviver*, Quotes FG 4.92, FG 4.94, FG 4.96 and FG 4.97 are comparable). Stacey (1999) concurred with this finding of Woods and Baker, quoting a participant who said:

'You don't tend to ask questions in a forum of a huge number of people, because you think, "oh this could be a stupid question' (Stacey 1999).

Stacey (1999) also gave two examples of students who did not participate fully in a course, or who dropped out, as they felt incompetent. One student explained that he felt daunted by the quality and quantity of the contributions of his peers. Both these

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students felt that they lacked knowledge of subject matter, and that their contributions would be of little value. Therefore, they did not contribute to the discussions, were irritated and lost interest. It seemed that some of the *CyberSurviver* students did not participate fully, as they experienced feelings of incompetence and were afraid of exposing their lack of knowledge.

Interestingly though, it seems that the Internet may accommodate learners who previously might have felt intimidated or shy. Larson and Keiper (2002) report that learners, who often do not participate in a face-to-face situation, become more conversational in the online environment. They hold the opinion that, even though many learners express a preference for face-to-face interaction, the Internet does act as an effective communication medium.

According to Yu, Chang, Liu and Chan (2002), 'gaming' as instructional method serves as a powerful technique to capture student interest. Competition, as an element of the game, may serve as motivational factor. *CyberSurviver* was a game, and competition a key element of the game. The participants, however, did not experience the module as a game, and felt that the competition aspect made it even more stressful. However, the competition aspect did motivate them to comply with the requirements of the module.

According to a study by Vonderwell (2003:86), students commonly expressed the opinion that communication in the Web-based environment should be clear, and e-messages carefully constructed. He quoted a student who said that one should express one's feelings and ideas clearly because people interpret things differently. The relevant quotes are given below:

'You need to know exactly what the instructor wants. Sometimes you are going to have a miscommunication; someone is going to post or read something incorrectly' (Vonderwell 2003:86).

'You have to be sure that you're being clear . . . that there is no question about what you're asking or what you are saying. Online learning made me think a little bit more of how everybody interprets things differently ...' (Vonderwell 2003:86).

According to Vonderwell (2003:86), the asynchronous communication environment encourages students to carefully construct and express their ideas. This was also true of *CyberSurviver* participants who indicated that they used MSWord to edit their e-

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messages. Vonderwell mentioned a student who said that Web-based learning had improved her communication skills, as she had learnt to clarify items, ask questions, and specify her concerns. Vonderwell also quoted a student who said that asynchronous communication improved collaborative learning. The relevant quote reads as follows:

'In the web-based class communication between people is a lot different With the forum questions students are able to express themselves a lot more, unlike in a classroom setting . . . so I get to learn from other people's ideas as well as from the teachers' (Vonderwell 2003:86).

Interaction between students, or between students and the lecturer, is however not the only form of interaction in the online learning environment. Woods and Baker (2004) state that online learning always includes an element of student-environment interaction. They define this type of interaction as:

'A reciprocal action or mutual influence between a learner and the learner's surroundings that either assists or hinders learning' (Woods & Baker 2004).

This definition emphasises the role that multiple contexts, such as the family, workplace, and peer groups, play in the online learning process. The student simultaneously engages and interacts with these contexts, which extend beyond the online environment. Woods and Baker (2004) refer to this as learner-context interaction. When considering the support and positive experiences they had, *CyberSurviver* participants clearly stated how important interactions with their families and colleagues were.

Vonderwell (2003:82) also explored the relation between the participant's image and participation in a traditional versus online classroom situation. Participants indicated that they were concerned about their image (about how they were perceived by other students) when they asked questions in a face-to-face classroom situation. The participants found it difficult to ask questions or communicate their ideas in the face-to-face situation, because they were afraid that they would *'look stupid.'* Contrary to this, some of the participants said that the online environment encouraged participation, as they were less concerned about their image while they were communicating online. One participant commented as follows:

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'It [online classroom] is free in being more anonymous and you can express your feelings and ask more questions without worrying about what other people think about you . . . I ask more questions [in the online class], so I am more clear on things and it just expands what I am learning' (Vonderwell 2003:82).

Contrary to this finding by Vonderwell, *CyberSurviver* participants experienced the 'online classroom' as stressful, as they were quite concerned about how they were perceived in this environment by not only their peers, but also family members and friends. Their fears related to their interaction in the online environment and whether or not they would achieve the outcomes of the module (see Quotes FG 4.92, FG 4.94, FG 4.96 and FG 4.97). Woods and Baker (2004) also found that students showed considerable concern and anxiety about the form of messages and, specifically, spelling mistakes. Some students produced carefully prepared pieces throughout the course. (With regard to the concerns of *CyberSurvivers*, see Quotes FG 4.98 to FG 4.100 and FG 4.106). According to Woods and Baker (2004), a tutor of a course once mentioned that he *'always put deliberate spelling mistakes in his early messages to help the students relax'*. However, not all students would feel equally comfortable with such a relaxed style.

As the online student is impaired by the *'lack of casual contact with the teacher and other students'*, it is critical that they receive prompt feedback from the lecturer (Galusha 1997). Thus, their satisfaction with a course is related to the level of interaction with the lecturer (Roblyer 1999:160). It is important that the lecturer provides appropriate online feedback and support, and stimulates and maintains the student's interest (Moore 1989:3). Gabriel (2004:55) notes that students are motivated by regular interaction with the lecturer, which also improves learning. Students prefer *"prompt unambiguous feedback"* on a continuous basis. This poses a problem, as e-communication often is asynchronous.

CyberSurviver participants were however very satisfied with the frequency of feedback from their lecturer and the manner in which feedback was given. It seemed that the lecturer had made the most of online teaching, and managed it well. According to Anderson (2002), compared to all types of interaction, students place the highest value on student-lecturer interaction. The *CyberSurviver* participants' positive experiences with regard to feedback from and interaction with the lecturer are seen as a very encouraging result.

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The *CyberSurviver* participants also had to interact with their peers but, due to the nature of the learning environment (being divided into groups and competing against each other), student-student interaction was not always experienced as positive. Even though they did not interact face-to-face, they had negative experiences, which were very similar to problems that members of traditional groups experience when they compete face-to-face (Yu *et al.* 2002).

Face-to-face competition may lead to disagreements, mild irritations, and conflict within groups. Picciano (2002) concurs, saying that, within any kind of competition, for a person to win, another person must lose. However, Picciano is of the opinion that:

'...competition in the anonymous mode is more likely to reduce the tension, stress, anxiety, nervousness or other similar negative emotional states on the players as usually exhibited in the face-to-face competition mode'.

Although the *CyberSurviver* participants competed against each other in an online game, they were acquainted, as they had interacted before in a normal classroom setting. Because the game could not be played within the boundaries of 'online anonymity', and because of group cohesion that developed, participants did not follow the rules of the game. In addition, some regarded the achievement of goals and good marks as their main priority. For these reasons, at the later stages of the game, the competition aspect was ignored or undermined.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, the first category, namely *Curative Factors*, identified during the data analysis and coding process of this study, was discussed. Three clusters of themes were identified, namely *Altruism versus Individualism*, *Communication*, and *Internal Drive and Value System*. The concepts, definitions, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria relating to the clusters were explained. The discussion included quotations obtained from the transcripts of focus group interviews, as well as quotes from synchronous conversations on *Yahoo! Messenger* and e-mail text messages that students sent to each other and the lecturer while the module was active. Applicable literature was discussed in an effort to compare the experiences of the *CyberSurviver* participants to those of participants in similar studies.

Chapter 4: Curative Factors

The next chapter will include a discussion of the second category, namely *Process of Affective Development (Initial Phase, Second Phase and Third Phase)*. Relevant literature will be discussed.