

Examining Cultural Factors Affecting Academic Developers in Performing Staff Development Functions in Three South African Universities

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ABSTRACT Academic development practitioners in most institutions in South Africa grapple with the issue of identity and establishing themselves in their role of staff developing academics. Informed by Archer's theory of structure, culture and agency, this qualitative study sought to establish cultural factors enabling or constraining academic developers in performing their staff development functions in three historically disadvantaged universities in South Africa. The study utilised a case study design in which a purposive sample of academic development practitioners from three South African universities participated. Data were collected through individual interviews with participants. Content analysis was used to interpret data. The study found that academic staff developers faced a lot of resistance from academic staff members who were themselves resistant to change, held academic development centres with mistrust as they perceived them as managerial units and in some cases were outright uncooperative showing a negative attitude towards staff development efforts by academic developers. The study found that there were enabling cultural factors that included the willingness of new and young staff members to participate in staff development programmes. The study concludes that in some cases it was not easy for academic development practitioners to establish themselves and perform their functions. The study recommends the need for systematic buy-in to ensure mindset change and cooperation from academics.