EDUCATING FOR EMPLOYABILITY IN OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

by

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DECLARATION

I, Shairn Lorena Hollis-Turner, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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ABSTRACT

Diversity and transformation demands on higher education require that all universities of technology revisit and redesign their qualifications and curricula in order to meet the challenges facing the higher education system in the 21st century, and to align with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. The study focused on the knowledge bases of the current and new Diplomas in Office Management curricula, and how these were aligned with the broader aim of enhancing the employability of graduates.

The problem investigated was the contribution of higher education to the work readiness of graduates within a diploma curriculum at a university of technology. This thesis argues that employability is enhanced by the programme and its content. The National Diploma in Office Management is currently being phased out, and a new programme, the Diploma in Office Management, is being developed. These two qualifications are the main focus of this thesis. Knowledge is considered an important component of modern societies, and thus the knowledge bases of the Office Management curricula can play a vital role in fostering the employability of graduates.

The theoretical framework draws on three dimensions of Maton's Legitimation Code Theory. These dimensions are Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation, which allow for the analysis of the Office Management curriculum to enable the researcher to develop an understanding of the knowledge base of service and professional knowledge bases of the curriculum. The recontextualisation processes for professional curricula involve the recontextualisation of work practices into academic subjects as well as the recontextualisation of disciplinary knowledge into applied subject areas. This process involves a series of knowledge translations involving choices and struggles, for example, to determine which disciplines are essential in a National Diploma Office Management curriculum. These choices of what makes different categories of knowledge practices legitimate, and the purposes and interests they serve are conceptualised in Legitimation Code Theory.

The use of Legitimation Code Theory determined the multi-method approach used to include the views of graduates, employers and academics, who were able to bring their own experiences, expectations, concerns and perspectives into the research process. The methods of data collection included Delphi surveys, documentary data from minutes of DACUM and curriculum workshops, curricular documents and course material, third-year student and alumni surveys, and interview documentation with academics from international and local institutions. These sources were used to secure triangulation of data gathering. The Autonomy dimension of Legitimation Code Theory was drawn on to analyse the documentary and

curricular data to examine the history, origin and mission of the Office Management curricula to determine who decided on the knowledge bases of the curricula. The Delphi survey was designed to determine the knowledge areas which form the basis of the Office Management curricula, and to obtain additional content which had been omitted from the current curriculum to assist with the recurriculation of the new Diploma in Office Management.

The data from the Delphi surveys, curricular and documentary data and interview data, were analysed by drawing on the Semantic dimension of Legitimation Code Theory to examine the content and knowledge areas which give the Office Management curricula meaning. The design of the Delphi survey also aimed to determine the attributes necessary for the role of the office administrator. The analysis of data produced from a variety of sources utilising the dimensions of the Legitimation Code Theory established that the knowledge base of office management work is that of professional service and support.

The findings show that the Office Management curricula focus on technical and highly practical and contextual components with less emphasis given to the significant role of the linguistic knowledge base. Language, writing and oral communication skills are the foundation of the work of office administrators and office managers who are required to communicate at all levels of the organisation with employees and senior staff, and between the company and its stakeholders. The workplace demands of the field of information technology are continuously changing, and focusing on the "technology" without focusing on the communication knowledge principles that support this technology, gives evidence of what Maton calls knowledge blindness in the curriculum. This harks to when the focus on the mechanics of typing and shorthand caused the work of secretaries to become underrated as the focus was not on the multiple and complex literacies associated with this work. A solid disciplinary core of communication theory and a sound knowledge of business communication genres and technical communication are essential for graduates. This will provide graduates with the complex knowledge they will need to draw on to cope with the demands of the dynamic workplace, changing technology and society, and an unknown future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GLOSSARY

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CRM	Customer Relationship Management Software
CTP	The Committee of Technikon Principals
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning Software Products
ETDP – SETA	The Education, Training and Development Practices – Sector Education and Training Authority
FCS	Faculty Configuration Scenario
FET	Further Education and Training
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IT	Information Technology
LCT	Legitimation Code Theory
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
OM	Office Management
SAP	Systems Application Programming

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CHAPTER 1: EMPLOYABILITY IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

> "Knowledge economies" based on the creation, circulation and consumption of information rather than material goods are said to require workers to engage in "lifelong learning" to keep pace with the resulting fluidity of labour markets (Maton, 2014:1).

1.1 Introduction to thesis

There are few professions that have changed as rapidly as those in the world of business (Miller, 2010:1). The key drivers of this change have been new technologies, new areas of work, the increasing specialisation of work and the pressures of the information age. This thesis argues that these rapid and wide-spread changes have caused many educators to lose confidence in the traditional knowledge bases of their fields, and thus to replace traditional subjects, such as Business Communication, with new information and communications technology(ICT)-based subjects, such as Business Applications. This thesis further argues, in the case of office administrators, that the replacement of core knowledge areas, such as Business Communication, with new technology-driven subjects, has eroded the quality of training provision and has had concomitant effects on the status and scope of work available to office administrators. The stereotypical view of the secretary as merely replicating the words of others reduces the skills of the secretary and of office administrators to that of the "mechanical communication skills" of typing and data processing, thereby limiting promotion prospects (Truss et al., 2013:349).

The focus of this thesis is the curricular arrangements for the training and education of office administrators over the period 2010–2014. The thesis uncovers the knowledge bases from which the curricular selections were made across the two main iterations of the qualification. Office administrators are known by different names, such as office "managers", "secretaries", "personal assistants", "data processors" or "typists", depending on the type of work they are required to do. Curricular arrangements for office administration studies are largely based on the work of the office administrator in support of people in a range of different industries, professions and contexts. What characterises the curriculum on which this is based is the knowledge base of service. The thesis unpacks the knowledge base of service through different curricular variations, both past and present, for the training of office administrators.

The current qualification offered at universities of technology in South Africa is the National Diploma: Office Management (OM). This is a three-year qualification that involves a combination of classroom-based teaching and practical or experiential learning. Currently, all national diplomas are being phased out, and a new qualification, the Diploma in Office Management, is in development. These two qualifications – and the developments that occurred across the time that separates them – are the main focus of this thesis. The problem

identified is the erosion of professionalism, and its replacement with a greater focus on the mechanical tasks of office work implied in the curricular practices and arrangements of the current and new diploma qualifications in office management. In order to address this problem, the objectives of this thesis are:

- To investigate the decision-making processes of the current and new diploma qualifications in office management.
- To identify the knowledge areas which were drawn on in the development of the current and new Office Management curricula.
- To identify the attributes of office administrators implied by the current and new diploma progammes.
- To determine the overarching knowledge base of OM work with the objective of enhancing the employability of graduates.

This research study was guided by the following research questions:
1. Who decided on the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum?
2. What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the current and new qualifications for office administrators?
3. What attributes are implied by the current and new qualifications for the role of office administrator?
4. What is the knowledge base of OM work?

The problem investigated is the contribution of higher education towards the work readiness of graduates within a diploma curriculum at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). In order to determine why so many of the graduates of CPUT and more specifically those graduates of the OM programme are unemployed (Cape Higher Education Consortium, 2013:33) it is necessary to look at the knowledge bases of the curriculum. Universities often make a "wish list" (Barrie, 2006:215) of knowledge, skills and attributes that will supposedly foster the employability of graduates. However, this thesis argues that it is the programme and the content of the programme, together with a number of other factors, which will foster the employability of graduates. Knowledge matters and "knowledge itself needs to be taken seriously" (Maton, 2014:14) and therefore the knowledge bases selected for the OM curricula can be expected to play a critical role in enhancing the employability of graduates.

The identification of the knowledge bases of the various iterations of the qualification will determine what makes the OM graduate more or less "employable" in terms of desired

attributes. The study shows the specific kinds of graduates who were considered desirable at different stages in the history of office work.

For some, office management would fall very clearly into the area of "vocational" work (e.g., Muller, 2009:214), while for others the vocation/professional distinction is not as clear cut (e.g., Young, 2006:110). For the purpose of this study, office administration is described as a professionally oriented field, in other words, it has aspirations to the professionalising of practice and the establishment of codes of professional conduct (Young & Muller, 2014:15).

The significance of this research lies in providing an understanding of the knowledge base of the OM curriculum and guidelines for the curricular arrangement for the training and education of office administrators. Universities of technology will therefore gain a better understanding of what constitutes powerful professional knowledge in the OM curricula to support the employability of graduates for the mutual benefit of students and potential employers. The findings of this research project fed into the recurriculation requirements for the Diploma: OM curriculum in accordance with the new qualifications framework of the South African Department of Education (2007), and contributed to the development of the submission of the Diploma: OM for CPUT Category B curriculum analysis and review in 2014. This research project provided academics with the opportunity to make further improvements to the current National Diploma: OM curriculum in order to foster the employability of the OM graduates.

1.2 Background: Office Management in South Africa

In South Africa office administrators are trained in different contexts. Some are trained in the workplace, some at technical colleges (known as TVET colleges in some countries) and some at universities of technology. The focus of this research is the OM curriculum offered by universities of technology in South Africa.

The OM programme was previously offered under various names, such as Secretarial Studies, and students could choose between Executive Secretary, Legal Secretary, Medical Secretary or Tourism Secretary. Certificate and diploma courses were offered and they were usually housed in the Department of Secretarial Studies at the former South African technikons. At present the programme is offered at the Durban University of Technology, the CPUT (Cape Town), Central University of Technology (Free State), the Tshwane University of Technology (Pretoria), the Mangosuthu University of Technology (Durban) and the Walter Sisulu University (Eastern Cape). The Durban University of Technology has campuses in

Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and the CPUT has sites in Bellville, Wellington, Mowbray and Cape Town. The Central University of Technology (Free State) has delivery sites in Bloemfontein and regional learning centres in Welkom, in the Free State, and Kimberley in the Northern Cape. The Tshwane University of Technology has delivery sites in eMalahleni, Polokwani and Pretoria. The Mangosuthu University of Technology is situated in Umlazi, south west of Durban, and the Walter Sisulu University has delivery sites in Butterworth, Buffalo City, Mthatha, Bhisho and Queenstown.

Du Pré (2004:11) describes universities of technology as contributing to a diversified South African higher education system as they concentrate on applied knowledge and practical applications, and contribute to "greater technology transfer and international competitiveness". The curricula of universities of technology have had a strong legacy in career-oriented education. They have traditionally understood the workplace as both a site of knowledge production and as a learning resource. The strength of their curricula is that "students are simultaneously acculturated" into academic knowledge systems as well as workplace knowledge systems (Engel-Hills et al., 2005:292).

1.2.1 The local context of the research

Secretarial studies were offered at South African Colleges for Advanced Technical Education, prior to these institutions becoming technikons in the 1970s, with a mandate to focus on technical higher education and training of technicians in the engineering disciplines. Technikons continued to offer secretarial training, which was embedded in institutional history and context and seemed to serve workplace needs.

At some technikons, secretarial diplomas were offered in the Business Faculty, while at others, these diplomas were housed in disparate academic locations, such as the School of Communication, Journalism and Secretarial Studies. Students commenced with a one-year qualification, the National Certificate: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary). They then continued with the National Higher Certificate: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) and in the third year (after obtaining the National Certificate and National Higher Certificate) qualified with a National Diploma: Secretarial (Executive Secretary). In 1987 the Diploma at some institutions was called "Secretarial Studies" and students could choose to be trained as an Executive Secretary, Legal Secretary, Medical Secretary or Tourism Secretary. This was offered as a three-year diploma. The programme known as the National Diploma: Secretarial (Executive Secretary) comprised Communication in English or Afrikaans, Office Administration 1, 2 and 3, Typing Technology 1, 2 and 3, Shorthand 1 & 2 (or *Snelskrif* 1

and 2), with elective offerings in Secretarial Public Relations, Personnel Management, Financial Accounting or Legal Practice. In 1990, the programme became known as the National Diploma: Secretarial Office Administration with the same subject choices listed above. The change in nomenclature implies dissatisfaction with the label of "Secretarial Studies" and a move towards a title that is more distinctive. There was concern that the secretarial diplomas were deemed to be at the college level and might be closed (Du Toit, 2008).

In the early 1990s, departments and programmes began a process of curriculum revision and development in anticipation of degree programmes. Following curriculum revision in 1992, the programme changed its nomenclature to the National Diploma in Business Administration and included subjects such as Business Administration 1, 2 and 3, Information Administration 1, 2 and 3, Communication 1 and 2, Mercantile Law 1, Legal Practice 1 and optional offerings of Financial Accounting 1 and Personnel Management 1. By 1995, technikons were given degree-awarding status and in 1996, the name changed to the National Diploma: Commercial Administration, with the same subjects offered as in the Business Administration diploma.

The curriculum was redesigned once more in the late 1990s and was moved to the School of Informatics at some technikons and to the Business Faculty of others. In 1999 the programme was called the National Diploma in OM, after consultation with all the technikons in South Africa. Consensus was obtained from 87% of the technikon staff for the name change to OM. The convenor technikon at the time was the Technikon of the Free State in Bloemfontein. The convenor technikon system (DoE, 1997b) stipulated that when a technikon proposed to "submit a new or revised instructional offering it should clear the proposed instructional curriculum with all the other technikons… [and] with the industry and vocational councils/bodies in question" (DoE, 1997b:20). As a result of the convenor system, the subjects of the OM diploma offered at all universities of technology are the same, or similar. The subjects, following the revision, remained much the same as those in the National Diploma in Business Administration, which implies that the subjects had more to do with office management, than with "business" or "commercial" administration. Refer to Table 1.1 for the schematic representation of the local context of the research project.

Table 1.1: Local context of the research project

Pre - 1970s	SA Colleges for Advanced Technical Education		Secretarial studies
1970s	**TECHNIKONS**		**CURRICULUM**
	Secretarial Diploma housed in the Business Faculty at some technikons	Secretarial Diploma housed in School of Journalism, Secretarial Studies and Communication at some technikons	One year qualification: National Certificate: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) Two year qualification: National Higher Certificate: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) Three- year qualification: National Diploma: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary)
1987	3 year Diploma: Secretarial Studies: Executive Secretary/ Legal Secretary/ Medical Secretary/Tourism Secretary		National Diploma: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) Communication in English/Afrikaans, Office Administration 1, 2 & 3, Typing Technology 1, 2 & 3, Shorthand 1 & 2/ Snelskrif 1 & 2, Elective offerings: Secretarial Public Relations, Personnel Management, Financial Accounting/ Legal Practice
1990	National Diploma: Secretarial Office Administration		Communication: English/Afrikaans, Office Administration 1, 2 & 3, Typing Technology 1, 2 & 3, Shorthand 1 & 2/ Snelskrif 1 & 2, Elective offerings: Secretarial Public Relations, Personnel Management, Financial Accounting/ Legal Practice
1992	National Diploma: Business Administration		Business Administration 1, 2 & 3, Information Administration 1, 2 & 3, Communication 1 & 2, Mercantile Law 1, Legal Practice 1 Optional offerings: Financial Accounting 1, Personnel Management 1
1996	National Diploma: Commercial Administration		Business Administration 1, 2 & 3, Information Administration 1, 2 & 3, Communication 1 & 2, Mercantile Law 1, Legal Practice 1 Optional offerings: Financial Accounting 1, Personnel Management 1
1999	Convenor technikon: Technikon of the Free State - Consensus for the name change to the National Diploma: Office Management		Business Administration 1, 2 & 3, Information Administration 1, 2 & 3, Communication 1 & 2, Mercantile Law 1, Legal Practice 1 Optional offerings: Financial Accounting 1, Personnel Management 1
2007 - 2015	National Diploma: Office Management offered at CPUT		Current core syllabi: Information Administration 1, 2 & 3, Business Administration 1, 2 & 3, Communication 1 & 2, Legal Practice 1, Mercantile Law OM Practical Module A, OM Practical Module B Elective offerings: Personnel Management 1,Financial Accounting 1, Legal Practice 2

At some universities of technology the current OM departments are usually housed in the Faculties of Business. The programme is now offered at some campuses on both a fulltime and part-time basis. At the different campuses of CPUT, students are predominantly English speakers, Afrikaans speakers or indigenous African language speakers. On most campuses the medium of instruction is English. The Baccalaureus Technologiae (BTech): OM curriculum is a technical qualification similar to the BTEC Higher National Diploma offered at British polytechnics. The BTech qualification has currently made bachelor-level studies in OM available to students. It is offered on both a fulltime and part-time basis at some campuses. Graduates of the National Diploma: OM find positions of employment in a variety of fields in the workplace. These include positions of office administrator, secretary, personal assistant, administrative office manager, personal assistant to the manager, data processor, assistant in a personnel department, an accountancy or a legal section of an organisation or legal firm.

The Diploma qualification is described by the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework as primarily having

> … a vocational orientation, which includes professional, vocational, or industry-specific knowledge that provides a sound understanding of general theoretical principles as well as a combination of general and specific procedures and their application. The purpose of the Diploma is to develop graduates who can demonstrate focused knowledge and skills in a particular field. Typically they will have gained experience in applying such knowledge and skills in a workplace context. A depth and specialisation of knowledge, together with practical skills and experience in the workplace, enables successful learners to enter a number of career paths and to apply their learning to particular employment contexts from the outset. Diploma programmes typically include an appropriate work-integrated learning (WIL) component (South Africa, 2013:24).

To this end, the mission statement for the National Diploma: OM curriculum offered at CPUT is as follows: "Our mission is to empower our students and staff through innovative teaching, learning and research in partnership with the community and industry" (OM Department, 2009:3), and the vision of the OM Department is to:

> Provide the global business world with multi-skilled professionals. The OM Department aims to provide the local and international corporate sector with graduates who are skilled in management, administration and technology (OM Department, 2009:3).

The requirements for admission to the National Diploma: OM curriculum are:

> A National Certificate (Vocational) level 4 issued by the Council for General and Further Education and Training with: English – 50% and Life Orientation – 50% on National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 4; Mathematics – 50% or Mathematics Literacy 60% on National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 4. At least four relevant vocational syllabi on National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 4 with a minimum of 60% (OM Department, 2009:3).

The subject content of the National Diploma: OM programme has always been multidisciplinary. The HOD claimed in a report that this has accounted for its adaptability and strength in the dynamic workplace (Du Toit, 2008:1). The National Diploma: OM includes studies in the fields of Information Administration, Business Administration, Communication, Personnel Management, Financial Accounting, Mercantile Law and Legal Practice, and OM Practical comprising six months internship of third-year students.

1.2.2 Core subjects of the National Diploma: Office Management

The core subjects of the current National Diploma curriculum have changed over the years in response to input from Advisory Committees that comprise employers of graduates and third-year students or interns undertaking the OM Practical or work-integrated learning component, and the academics of the OM Department. These meetings are usually held annually or bi-annually, or when necessary, and are usually convened by the coordinator of the OM Practical component, the Cooperative Education[1] academic (Hollis-Turner, 2008:72).

These meetings provide a forum for the discussion of the progress of the students undertaking their OM Practical as well as their shortcomings. Students returning from the six-month internship are given the opportunity to provide input on their experiences in the workplace and to make suggestions for improvements to the curriculum. OM academics also provide input on the course offerings based on the areas of knowledge they believe office administrators should be studying.

Changes to the core syllabi have also been made as a result of integration with other syllabi in the curriculum and to update and add new features, such as the introduction of new software applications.

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[1]Cooperative education in the South African context refers to a form of experiential learning in which final-year students undertake internships at relevant work sites for a period of time, usually 3–6 months.

The National Diploma: OM is a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) qualification 78653, National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 6, with 360 credits. The South African Education, Training and Development Practices – Sector Education and Training Authority Report 2010/2011 lists the top five occupations nationally in the ETDP sector that require specialised critical skills at the national level. Two of these are those of "Office Administrators (communication, time management, data capturing, report writing amongst others); General Secretaries (minute taking, bookkeeping, filing management amongst others)" (SA Education, Training and Development Practices (South Africa. EDTP, 2010:62). Administrators are required in all sectors of the economy and there is a demand for their expertise in the workplace.

The current core syllabi of the National Diploma curriculum were designed at the beginning of 2007. Amendments of up to 30% can be made without the syllabi's presentation to Senate for approval. In the event of more than 30% of a core syllabus being changed, the approval of Senate is required. As a result, changes and inclusions have been made to the original core syllabi within the minimum requirements of 30%. For example, the core syllabus for Communication 1 lists business correspondence under the written communication category. Business correspondence has been updated to include numerous types of business letters of enquiry, complaint, and invitation. The core syllabi of the National Diploma: OM are discussed below.

1.2.2.1 Information Administration

In the 1990s the curriculum was redesigned, and Typing Technology replaced by Information Administration as a major subject (DuToit, 2008:2). The core syllabi for Information Administration (Appendix A) comprise 36 credits for the first- and second-year level and 40 credits for the third year. The content of this major subject is constantly amended in response to input from the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee members have always influenced the selection of new content to be included in syllabi (Hollis-Turner, 2008:72). Input from interns returning from the six-month OM Practical is also taken into consideration to include new features of current software applications. The demand for information technology skills presents academic staff with enormous challenges to prepare students with relevant skills for progressively complex and changing worlds (Castells & Cardoso, 2005:8).

The UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey, "The Employability Challenge", regards computer technology skills as one of the essential employability skills (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2009:4). At a national level, the Council on Higher Education report

(CHE, 2013b:176) recommends that the development of information and communications technology skills be incorporated into as many programmes as possible. The challenge facing the Information Administration academics is how to ensure that graduates are prepared for the technological demands of the varied fields in which they find employment. The field of information technology is constantly changing and it is required of higher education to not only keep abreast of business practices, but to ensure that graduates are taking innovative information technology knowledge into their future workplaces. The role of higher education is not to prepare students for the current workplace, but for the workplaces of an unknown future (Barnett, 2004:251).

1.2.2.2 Business Administration

In the 1980s the Office Administration syllabi were presented over three years of the curriculum known as the National Diploma: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) offered at some of the former technikons. In 1992 it became known as the National Diploma: Business Administration and the subject Office Administration changed in accordance with the name change of the curriculum to Business Administration (Appendix B). The Business Administration syllabus is offered over three years and comprises 36 credits each for the first- and second-year syllabi and 40 credits for the third-year syllabus. Employability skills are defined as including an understanding of the business and how the individual fits into the organisation, recognising the needs of customers and service users and contributing to the organisation (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2009:4).

1.2.2.3 Communication

Since the commencement of the curriculum in the 1980s the National Diploma: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) has included Communication, in English or Afrikaans, which has been offered at some former technikons. It has been considered an important component of the origins of the National Diploma curriculum and as a recognised language of business it is essential in the preparation of students for the workplace. The Communication syllabi (Appendix C) are presented over two years and comprise 20 credits each for the first and second year.

In the workplace, the main focus of communication, whether local or global, interpersonal or electronic, is the "job-related message" (Grant & Borcherds, 2002:5). The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009:6) defined employability skills as including "using language effectively – writing clearly and in a way appropriate to the context, ordering facts and concepts logically" and " using telephones and other technology to communicate". This

definition of employability relates specifically to the necessity for office administrators to be effective communicators in the workplace. In the South African context, the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) study (Griesel & Parker, 2009:9) describes employability as influenced by skilful practices that include communication. The Council on Higher Education report (CHE, 2013b:176) recommends that "the development of writing and other communication skills … should be integrated into as many courses as possible".

1.2.2.4 Personnel Management

This syllabus has been included in the National Diploma: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) since the 1980s as students needed to know about dealing with individuals and group dynamics when they entered the workplace. The Personnel Management core syllabus (Appendix D) comprises 14 credits and is offered over a one-year period at first-year level. Originally it was offered as an elective, but over the past few years has been incorporated as a permanent component of the National Diploma curriculum. Employability skills are described as including "working together – cooperating, being assertive, persuading, being responsible to others, speaking clearly to individuals and groups and listening for a response" (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2009: 6).

1.2.2.5 Financial Accounting

In the 1980s the curriculum known as the National Diploma: Secretarial: (Executive Secretary) included the optional offering of the Financial Accounting syllabus and at some technikons the curriculum included Elementary Practical Bookkeeping. It was considered to be an important component of the original secretarial studies' curricula. The core syllabus of Financial Accounting (Appendix E) comprising 14 credits was offered for a period of time as an elective at CPUT, but became a permanent component of the National Diploma curriculum in 2011. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009:6) defined employability skills as including "using numbers effectively – measuring, recording measurements, calculating, estimating quantities, [and] relating numbers to the job".

1.2.2.6 Legal Practice and Mercantile Law

The National Diploma: Secretarial (Executive Secretary) offered in the 1980s at some technikons included the syllabus for Legal Practice 1 and the elective option of Legal Practice 2. In the 1990s, Mercantile Law studies were introduced at some technikons. Executive secretaries needed to have knowledge of legal practice, as many acquired junior secretarial positions in law firms and needed knowledge of their rights in the workplace. The

syllabi were amended over the years to align with changes in law, for example, the inclusion of the study of close corporations.

The core syllabus for the first year of Legal Practice (Appendix F) comprises 14 credits, and the second year of the Legal Practice syllabus (Appendix F) was offered as an elective comprising 14 credits. This second-year syllabus has been discontinued, as the majority of students were selecting the Financial Accounting option instead of Legal Practice 2. The core syllabus for Mercantile Law (Appendix F) comprises 20 credits and is offered during the first semester of the third year of study.

1.2.2.7 Office Management Practical

The OM Practical syllabus (Appendix G) consists of work-integrated learning or experiential learning/training which is an approach used by the former technikons and by universities of technology to put learning into practice. This is learning combined with work and includes an organised curriculum merging applicable work experience with academic study. The OM Practical component of the curriculum is a method of offering interns an introduction to the world of work. It offers students the opportunity to practise the knowledge and skills learned during the two-and-a-half years of study, and to receive mentorship from their employers. It is undertaken during the third year of study for a period of six months after students have completed the second year of the OM curriculum. Interns are employed in a wide variety of fields, including advertising, tourism, medical, insurance, and legal, as well as in general business areas. Cooperative Education academics are responsible for this component of the OM curriculum and consult with the lecturing staff regarding the interns' progress (Hollis-Turner, 2008:9).

The original OM Practical component of the National Diploma was offered in the 1980s for a period of three months. In most instances there were no Cooperative Education academics responsible for the placement of interns in the workplace and the discipline academics had to undertake these responsibilities. There was also no classroom contact time. However, in an attempt to assist students with the transfer to the workplace, a Module A component of the syllabus comprising 14 credits was introduced. It is presented for two periods of 45 minutes per week for the final semester of the second-year curriculum, accommodating half of the students who enter the workplace at the beginning of the third year. During the first semester in the third year those students who have not entered the internship period receive tuition on the Module A component of the syllabus and enter the internship period in the final semester

of the third year. The Module B component has a credit distribution comprising 20 credits for the six-month internship period in the workplace.

The significance of internships is supported by research undertaken by the University of Glasgow on employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates. It found that one of the most critical measures to promote employability is the establishment of "integrated placements, internships and work-based learning opportunities of significant duration" (Lowden et al., 2011:25). At a national level, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013:16) emphasises the importance of close cooperation between employers and education providers, especially in professional curricula where on-the-job training, including learnerships and internships, should be expanded upon.

1.3 Rationale

Governments worldwide are concerned about the role higher education institutions play in the employability of graduates. There is growing pressure on higher education to heighten the employability of graduates by guaranteeing that the learning experiences of students contribute to instilling the attributes, knowledge and skills that will empower graduates to "perform successfully as citizens in the knowledge economy" (Nel & Neale-Schutte, 2013: 437). The South African Council on Higher Education conducted a study on relations between higher education and the labour market and found that business, government and civil society expect higher education to ensure the employability of graduates so that they are equipped to enter and make a contribution as "high-level skilled employees" to the labour market (Kruss, 2002:59). In this section, employability as an objective of this research, the changing contexts, and the impact of the information age on South Africa, the workplace and higher education, are discussed.

1.3.1 Employability as an objective of this research

Service in the field of office administration is different from that of the service industry for other sectors such as the banking and medical sectors. A service industry can be described as an enterprise that performs work for a customer. Service enterprises are involved in various sectors such as transport, the food industry, distribution, banking, and medical fields. The North American Industry Classification System (United States. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) describes the administrative and support services subsector as consisting of professions involved in activities that support the daily operations of other organisations. The individual professions comprising the subsector are defined according to the particular services they provide. One of the professions comprising the administrative and

support services subsector is that of office administrative services. The field of office administration operates at all levels of business within small, medium and large enterprises and is considered integral to the activities of organisations in all economic sectors (United States. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

The concept of "employability" dates back to the early 1900s and should not be confused with the acquisition of a graduate job which depends mainly on the state of the national economy and labour market patterns, as graduates may not find employment in their chosen occupations (McGrath, 2009:2). The challenge is how to keep up with the dynamic requirements of the labour market while maintaining the academic priorities of a higher education institution. A further challenge is how graduates acquire the knowledge and understanding, personal attributes or soft skills required in the changing workplace, and the role of higher education in fostering these understandings and attributes (ACT Inc., 2013:9).

Hillage and Pollard (1998:12) and Brown et al. (2002:9) broadly define employability as the chance of locating and keeping employment, depending on the attitudes, knowledge and skills of the individual. Mason et al. (2006:2) argue that employability often refers to work readiness, described as the new employee's possession of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and commercial understanding, enabling contributions to be made to the achievement of organisational goals after starting employment. Yorke and Knight (2006:5) identified four broad attainments on which employability is dependent, namely, knowledge and understanding; general and specific skills; efficacy beliefs and values; and metacognitive understanding. In educational research this position has remained dominant although it has been critiqued for neglecting other factors influencing employability.

Arguments against these viewpoints include those of McQuaid and Lindsay (2005:209-210), whose urban geographic model shows the other factors influencing employability, for example, industrial decline. Côté and Bynner (2008:251) argue that economic conditions may influence the social status of young individuals and subsequently their employability. Harvey and contributors (2003:3) contend that employability should be recognised as a process requiring more than the attributes, skills or experience just to empower a student to get a job or to advance progress. The subject discipline selected by the graduate impacts to some degree on the opportunities for employability development, for example, involvement in employability development is considered easier for students studying professional programmes. However, "vocationalism is not synonymous with employability" (Harvey, 2002:5).

A whole-curriculum approach is advocated by the work of Yorke and Knight (2006:2) and Lanning et al. (2008:2) argue that employability skills imply that there is a distinct "standard set of skills and behaviours" which limits and formalises "something that needs to be flexible and responsive to employer and learner needs and their context". It also cannot be assumed that employers know best regarding employability issues. What is needed is improved communication between employers and training providers to ensure that the training provided is relevant to both employers and employees (McQuaid et al., 2005:192-193).

Many academics "tend to equate employability with skills development" and often critique employability since they want no part in "skills training" (Harvey, 2003a:2). However, it is recognised that employability moves beyond the simple notion of key skills as it is "evidenced in the application of a mix of personal qualities, attributes, understandings, skilful practices, and reflective capacity" (Nel & Neal-Shutte, 2013:440). There is the risk of preparing students for a future that is uncertain, complex and unknowable, but higher education needs to focus on forward planning to prepare students for the rapidly changing world. This thesis argues that employability is preparing students for an uncertain future characterised by an "exponential growth in the volume, complexity and sources of knowledge" (Maton, 2014:1). It raises important questions about the role of higher education, which is not about training or providing additional skills to gain employment. Rather it is about the development of professionals who possess specialised expertise in a field of knowledge, and the skills and personal attributes required for the field of practice, in order to cope with the impact of the information age on the workplace and the demands of an unknown future.

1.3.2 Changing contexts and the impact of the information age

Globalisation suggests the common view that it is a borderless world. Globalisation is described as comprising economic integration; knowledge transfer and transmission; global transfer of policies; the generation, dealings, and dialogues of power; and as being a global process (Al-Rodhan & Stoudmann, 2006:3). Castells (2000a; 2000b) argues that we are entering the information age brought about by the introduction of new information technologies especially those for communication and biological technologies. Information is central to determining economic productivity and communications technologies allow for rapid and asynchronous communication.

The impact of information and communications technology on economic integration has shown that it has the tendency to provide the pathway for international transactions.

Technology has broken down the obstacles of time and geographical location, especially regarding financial systems and their associated transactions. However, there are also the negative consequences of the borderless world. For example, any instability on the New York Stock Exchange has a negative impact on the financial systems of the world. Developing countries are therefore at a far greater risk of financial volatility than ever before (Mapuva, 2010:395). The production of knowledge has been accelerated by knowledge-based technologies that have had major effects on the technological, social and business contexts in which business communication is practised in the workplace. This new development has become known as the "network society" (Castells & Cardoso, 2005:4) or the "knowledge economy" (Drucker, 1969:247). The challenge facing higher education institutions is to respond to the expectations of the network society and knowledge economy and to prepare students for increasingly changing contexts (Castells & Cardoso, 2005:8).

1.3.3 The information age and South Africa

South Africa is still grappling with developing its economy and also bringing restitution to its black population. The latest unemployment statistics measuring the number of individuals actively seeking employment as a percentage of the work force shows that the unemployment rate in South Africa increased to 25.5% in the second quarter of 2014 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The new democratic government has had to face the legacy of apartheid and economic competitiveness and this has resulted in tensions between reduced public expenditure on education, demands for increased accessibility to higher education, and increasing education levels to meet the demand for economic growth (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002:3).

Early in the 1990s the development of globalisation and the information age was starting to gain momentum. South Africa returned to the international economy which increased the availability of foreign skills and access to highly skilled international personnel. This may introduce threats of marginalisation, and it is therefore important for South Africa to develop and maintain new networks and alliances, thereby providing opportunities for sharing knowledge and skills to foster economic strength (Moloi et al., 2009:278). This should, however, not become a substitute for investment and training of the local labour force and an improvement in the conditions of employment (Maharaj, 2011:49). These issues have an impact on employability and higher education in South Africa. It is argued that higher education has a role to play in the preparation of graduates for the future, and this is part of a lifetime learning process to increase employment prospects and to enter society as responsible citizens (Griesel & Parker, 2009:5).

1.3.4 The information age and the workplace

The impact of the information age and the knowledge economy demands that workplaces shift from manual work in the manufacturing sectors to professions in the service sectors. Management structures have become flatter with fewer hierarchical levels, with the emphasis on establishing networks between organisations, regions and countries (Castells & Cardoso, 2005:5). The new workplace calls for individuals who can respond to rapid changes in knowledge and technology, who are flexible, and who participate in teamwork and the building of networks on many levels (Castells & Cardoso, 2005:8). This, together with technological advances and global economic dynamics, requires that graduates have higher levels of knowledge and skills (Nel & Neale-Schutte, 2013:450). Maton (2014:1) argues that never before has knowledge been considered so critical to the nature of society.

Higher education is confronted with the challenge of responding to the expectations of the knowledge society, which demands that students are expected to leave universities with a "set of competencies that make them employable on [*sic*] the global labour market" (Lillejord, 2005:1316). It has been proposed in policy discussions that cooperation between higher education and the world of work represents the way to enhanced economic drive, innovation and competitiveness (Benner & Sandström, 2000; Reeve & Gallacher, 2005; Reeve et al., 2007; Jongbloed et al., 2008; Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008). This has resulted in the creation of national innovation systems for improved methods to organise work-based learning and work-related learning (Virolainen & Stenström, 2013:376) to attain better employability of graduates in the current age of education for the masses.

Combined with technological progression, global political instability, and increasing globalisation, the workplace and society require a graduate who is responsive to these trends and who can become an agent of change. With high unemployment of youth in South Africa and many employers complaining of deficiencies in graduate preparedness, the challenge confronting higher education is how to best equip graduates with the necessary attributes that will prepare them for the transition into the workplace (Griesel & Parker, 2009:5). The changing workplace requires an understanding of what knowledge and attributes office administrators need to be effective in the workplace in order for the OM curriculum to better prepare graduates for the unknown future.

1.3.5 The information age and higher education

Educational reform is progressively affected by economic and social changes (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002:1). Davidson (2007:1184) argues that globalisation, the liberalisation of trade,

developments in information technology, biosciences, new materials and nanotechnology has fuelled the rise of the "knowledge economy" (Drucker, 1969:247).

Higher education internationally, as well as in South Africa (e.g., DoE, 1997a, 2002a, 2002b), has emphasised the need for increased graduate employability. Higher education reports such as the Robbins Report (1963), the Finn Committee (1991), the Mayer Committee (1992) in Australia, the Dearing Report (1997) in the UK, the DeSeCo Project (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2001), the Report on Employability Skills for Australian Industry (Curtis & McKenzie, 2002); REFLEX Project (Allen & Van der Velden, 2007), and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Universities UK Report (2009) all emphasise the role of the education and training sectors in preparing graduates to confront the challenges of a global knowledge-based economy.

Various attempts have also been made to meet the challenges of the information age and a competitive global economy. In South Africa, the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority aimed to facilitate access, mobility, and progression, accelerate redress, and contribute to the development of learners, and to the social and economic development of the country (SAQA, 2000:23). The need for a single qualifications framework for a coordinated higher education sector was highlighted in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) draft discussion document on policy issued under the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (South Africa. Ministry of Education, 2004:6), culminating in the integration of all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework.

Influenced by the Australasian, European and New Zealand qualifications frameworks, the National Qualifications Framework promoted Outcomes-Based Education (Allais, 2009:147, 149). The purpose of Outcomes-Based Education was to provide equal education opportunities and to empower all South Africans to contribute to the development of the country. This showed the State's promotion of curricula "supportive of … the needs of the economy" (Moore & Young, 2001:447). The National Qualifications Framework and curriculum development of critical cross-field outcomes provided a list of the critical outcomes adopted by the South African Qualifications Authority. This aimed to inform teaching and learning and was to be accomplished in all qualifications (Nkomo, 2000:18). The South African Education, Training and Development Practices – Sector Education and Training Authority (South Africa. ETDP, 2010:61) describes these as follows:

The critical cross-field outcomes or a *critical skill* is a skill required within an occupation to "top-up" performance. These can be generic or specific. *Key or generic skills*, in SAQA – NQF terminology, would include critical cross-field outcomes such as cognitive skills like problem solving, learning to learn, language and literacy, mathematics, ICT, and working in teams.

The response to the National Qualifications Framework requirements and the focus on learning outcomes has led to higher education institutions aligning their syllabi, curricula and courses with the requirements of Outcomes-Based Education (Erasmus & Van Dyk, 2003:14). The critique involving these competencies or outcomes-based approach is that it weakens or fragments the knowledge foundation of educational programmes (Wheelahan, 2008:10). In accordance with the National Plan for Higher Education (South Africa. Ministry of Education, 2001:44), the assumption is that the primary focus of the university of technology will be the cultivation of applied knowledge and job-related skills driven by market forces and entrepreneurialism (Imenda, 2005:1412). Du Pré (2004:17) contends that the focus of universities of technology should be "to deliver on-site education and research enriched by industrial and business experience ... A university of technology must deliver appropriately qualified graduates to the labour market ..."

The contexts in which universities of technology operate have changed constantly. The information age and globalisation has had a profound effect on technology, the workplace and education, and presents academic staff with enormous challenges in preparing students for increasingly complex and changing worlds (Barnett, 2004:249). The National Plan for Higher Education (South Africa. Ministry of Education, 2001:10) intended to increase the participation rate in higher education to meet the changing human resource and labour needs. The Higher Education Qualifications Framework promulgated a new framework to

… guide higher education institutions in the development of programmes and qualifications that provide graduates with intellectual capabilities and skills that can both enrich society and empower themselves and enhance economic and social development (DoE, 2007: 3).

The Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) has been a powerful catalyst in emphasising the skills needs of the South African economy and the important role which higher education has to play in this regard (Griesel & Parker, 2009:2).

However, there is still much work to be done regarding the development of relevant curricula to meet the challenges of the dynamic workplace. Graduate employability has therefore become a significant aspect of planning by institutional and academic forums since it is beneficial to higher education, employers and graduates' acquisition of an improved

understanding of the causes of unemployable graduates (Nel & Neale-Shutte, 2013:439). In this regard Breier (2001:2) questions, "What kind of curriculum could prepare students for participation in a global economy?" This is significant to this research project, which aims to determine the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum as well as the attributes required to enhance the employability of graduates.

1.3.5.1 The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework

The Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997a) identified the need for a single qualifications framework to promote the delivery of curricula and transfer of students between higher education institutions. As a result, the Higher Education Qualifications Framework was promulgated (DoE, 2007:5) to coordinate a unified higher education system. It emphasised the demarcation of different qualification routes as formative, professional and vocational. This allowed for universities of technology to offer degrees, as well as the three-year professionally oriented diploma, which had been their main undergraduate qualification.

The finalisation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework in October 2007 (DoE, 2007:5) provided an indication of the qualification types universities of technology would be offering in future. The phase one process of the South Africa Council on Higher Education, Higher Education Qualifications Framework Implementation Plan January 2011–September 2011 required the categorising of programmes into Category A, B or C. Institutions began to engage with the process of recurriculation and to raise any specific queries as they related to the implementation plan (CHE, 2011:3). CPUT selected the Category B framework, which allowed for the revision of the curricula that had originated with the Convenor Technikon system (CHE, 2011:4).

Further developments from the Department of Education (DoE, 2007:5) culminated in the promulgation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework in August 2013 (SAQA, 2013:6). The aim of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework is to "facilitate articulation between further education, including workplace-based education and training, and higher education, and within higher education" (South Africa, 2013:16). The newly promulgated Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act, Act No. 67 of 2008, is a framework of ten levels incorporating three sub-frameworks. These sub-frameworks are a General and Further Education and Training qualifications Sub-Framework, an Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework, and a Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (SAQA, 2013:11). This policy specifies

the "framework for the development and provision of general and further education qualifications" (SAQA, 2013:11).

The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework consists of six higher education levels (Levels 5–10), with varied qualifications requiring specific credits at different levels (Figure 1.1). Provided that universities of technology have the capacity, they are not excluded from offering any of these qualifications. Universities of technology commonly offer diploma-level curricula in advanced professional and technical fields, but many offer a full range of qualifications.

Research undertaken by the South African Qualifications Authority in 2005 established that the National Qualifications Framework has "... minimal positive impact or a mix of positive and negative impact" regarding the transferability of qualifications (SAQA, 2005:45). Allais (2009:164) suggests that those defending the National Qualifications Framework would argue that its contribution would have been greater had it been given more resources, political support and power. Allais argues that funding spent on the creation of the National Qualifications Framework has diverted resources and focus from the building of institutions, especially regarding workplace and professional education (Allais, 2009:164).
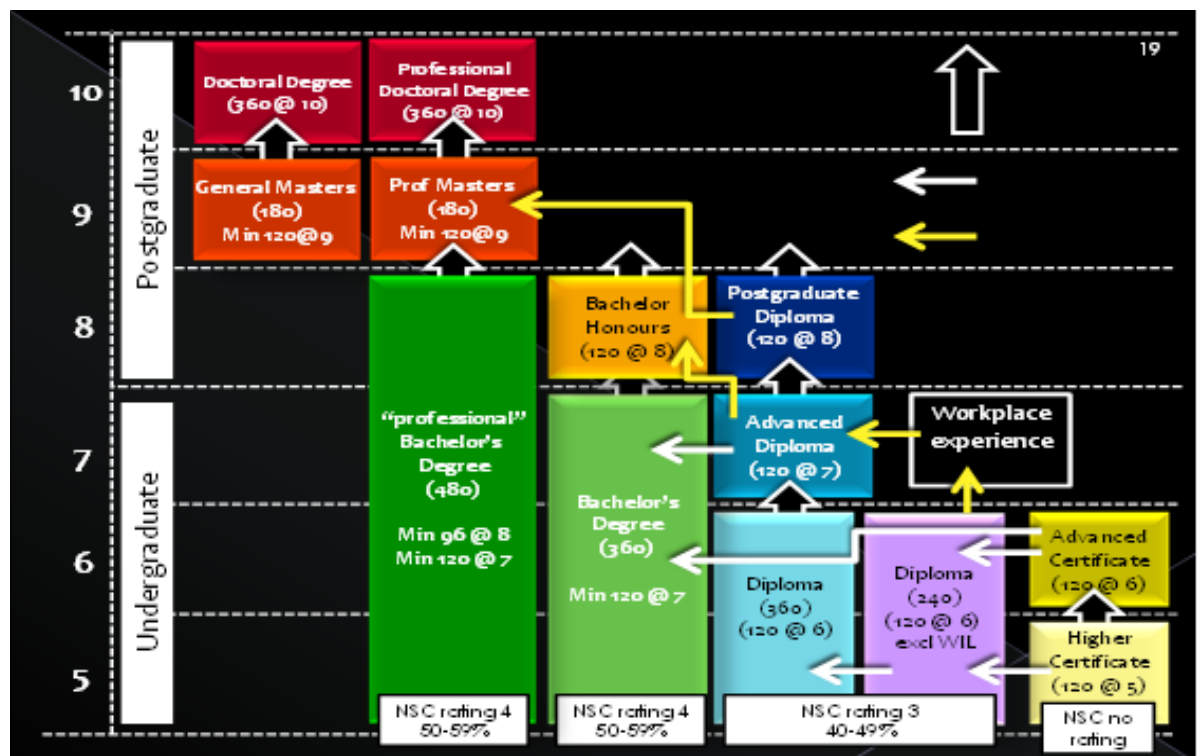
Figure 1.1: Schematic representation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (Bester, 2013)

1.4 The research questions

The curricular arrangement for training and education of office administrators and office managers is the emphasis of this thesis. Administrative work comprises the support of people in a range of different enterprises. What distinguishes the curriculum on which this is based is the knowledge base of service. This research project investigates what counts as knowledge in office management work in order to determine the knowledge base of the OM curriculum. In so doing it aims to enhance the employability of OM graduates and to prepare them for a constantly changing workplace and unknown future. The research objectives and questions developed to address this problem are strongly framed by "Legitimation Code Theory"(LCT), which is described as a conceptual framework "that enables knowledge practices to be seen, their organising principles to be conceptualized, and their effects to be explored" (Maton, 2014:2-3). In addition to the study of curricular documents, the Delphi method was predominantly used in this research as a means of canvassing expert opinion on the curriculum.

1.4.1 Who decided on the knowledge bases of the Office Management curriculum?

This question addresses the issues of national and institutional directives that influence the selection, sequencing, pacing and evaluation of the content of the curriculum. It includes the influences from outside of the higher education arena, as from industry, the workplace and government, which guide the development of the curriculum, and from within the university, such as contributions from academics and management.

1.4.2 What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the current and new qualifications for office administrators?

The investigation of the theoretical underpinnings of the OM curriculum is the focus of this question. Professional curricula are regions that draw on both theoretical and practical knowledge bases (Shay, 2012:12). An analysis of the knowledge bases of the current National Diploma: OM and the new Diploma: OM curricula identified the theoretical knowledge areas which provide a strong foundation for practice. It also identified the practical knowledge which draws on the field of office administration practice.

1.4.3 What attributes are implied by the current and new qualifications for the role of office administrator?

This question aimed to identify those attributes which are critical to carrying out office management work and enhancing the employability of graduates. The national perspectives on attributes for employability are that both employers and government require higher

education to produce graduates who have the capabilities, dispositions, attributes and abilities to work successfully (Griesel & Parker, 2009:5).

<u>1.4.4 What is the knowledge base of office management work?</u>

This is the overarching research question of the thesis. In determining the knowledge base of office management work, the examination of curricular variations of both the past and present training of office administrators was undertaken. This analysis draws on three dimensions of Karl Maton's "conceptual toolkit of LCT" (Maton, 2014:18) of Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation. Through this process it was possible to establish that the knowledge base of OM work is that of service in the administrative support of people in a range of different industries.

1.5 Introduction to the thesis structure

This is a brief overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2

In this chapter an overview is provided of the key issues and debates in the theoretical and research-based literature. This chapter provides the background to the secretarial and office administration profession, the training of secretaries and office administrators, the issue of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3) and the emerging knowledge bases for the curriculum for office administrators and office managers. The theoretical framework draws on three dimensions of Maton's "conceptual toolkit of LCT" (Maton, 2014:18). These dimensions are Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation, which allow for the analysis of the OM curriculum to develop an understanding of the knowledge base of service and professional knowledge bases of the curriculum. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter 3

This chapter deals with the research design, methodology and method of analysis employed in this thesis. A multi-method research design was employed to establish the knowledge base of OM work. The application of the Delphi technique and the reasons for selecting this method are explained with reference to the need to reveal the knowledge and judgements of others based on their experiences in the field of office administration (Dalkey, 1969:76).

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 presents and interprets data regarding the rebranding of secretarial work and the current National Diploma: OM curriculum. This section includes an analysis of the current curriculum, drawing on the dimensions of Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation of LCT.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 describes curricula offered at an international level that are similar to the current OM curriculum. These curricula were analysed drawing on the Semantic dimension of LCT to establish whether there was any consistency in the knowledge bases of the current diploma curriculum and that of four international institutions offering similar curricula.

Chapter 6

This chapter includes an interpretation and critique of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework submission for the new Diploma: OM curriculum. This submission is analysed, drawing on the Autonomy dimension of LCT to determine the regulative higher education and institutional discourses, and on the Semantic codes to determine the knowledge bases of the recurriculated Diploma. The utilisation of the Specialisation dimension enabled the identification of the ideal graduate who would emerge from the recurriculated diploma.

Chapter 7

In the final chapter, the conclusions of this research project, the research questions and the implications of the data analysis for the training of office managers are addressed. Conclusions and recommendations for the fostering of employability of OM graduates are presented.

In the next chapter, the literature review gives an overview of the educating of secretaries, the training of secretaries and office administrators in South Africa, "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3), and the emerging knowledge bases for the curriculum for office administrators and office managers. The theoretical framework for an understanding of the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum to promote graduate employability is developed.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> Our goal is to excavate a "hidden history" of how clerical work and the artifacts which sustain it have been understood and deployed under different cultural and economic circumstance … We argue that at various points over the twentieth century particular office technologies became "feminized", or associated with characteristics coded as feminine, as a means of shaping spatial practice and social relations in the workplace (Boyer & England, 2008:241).

2.1 Introduction

The work of secretaries has been described as "invisible work" (Star & Strauss, 1999:14), and work that is "routine" and not requiring training (Hennebach, 1989:43). Over time, the role of the secretary has diminished, become undervalued, and hidden within organisations (Russon, 1983:33). This lack of "visibility" has posed difficulties for curriculum designers, with some curricula focusing on very basic levels of training and others including areas that seem more technologically advanced or prestigious, but largely irrelevant to the work of office administration (Waymark, 1997:117). While secretarial and administrative work continues to be feminised, there have been changes in the nature of the job, promotional prospects, salary and qualifications that suggest a "degree of upskilling and rising status" (Truss et al., 2013:361).

These stages of evolution are evident in the development of curricula associated with the training of secretaries and office managers. This literature review addresses the factors contributing to this development and, in particular, examines the knowledge areas that are drawn on in the development of the secretarial curriculum. This chapter provides an overview of recent research on the secretarial profession and the education of secretaries and administrators, with a particular focus on the evolution of their training in South Africa. The chapter concludes with the development of a theoretical framework for the study of curricula intended to build the expertise of office administrators and enhance their employability in the South African context.

2.2 Educating secretaries: a brief overview

It is known that secretaries existed in ancient Egypt and in Rome prior to the establishment of the empire. They were usually educated men who took dictation as scribes, at a time when only a small percentage of the population was literate (Garfield, 1986:113). Secretaries acted as trusted advisors to whom confidential matters could be entrusted, and who could act as an assistant for a principal person (McKenna, 1987:134). The term "secretary" is derived from the Latin word *secernere*, "to distinguish" or "to set apart", the passive participle (*secretum*) meaning "having been set apart", with the eventual connotation of something private or

confidential, as with the English word "secret" (Biebuyck, 2006:10). A *secretarius* was a person, therefore, overseeing business confidentially, usually for a powerful individual, such as a king or pope (Garfield, 1986:112). As the duties of a modern secretary often still include the handling of confidential information, the literal meaning of their title, "the keeper of secrets", still holds true (Biebuyck, 2006:10).

Shorthand, a secret code, became part of the preparation and training of secretaries (and emperors as well, including Julius Caesar and Augustus) (Churchhouse, 2002:2). Modern shorthand is an evolution of this role of taking down confidential information in coded form, which eventually developed into a field of study. In medieval times the scribe or secretary handled secret matters for the monarch. Only government officials and scholars of high standing were appointed to this significant role and hence the development of the role of Secretary of State (Russon, 1983:31).

In early modern times, members of the nobility had secretaries. They were always men; most had command of several languages, including Latin, and were required to have a broad, general education (England & Boyer, 2009:310). As commerce and trade expanded, people of wealth and power needed secretaries (confidants and trusted agents) to handle correspondence on private or confidential matters, most particularly matters of state. Following the Renaissance, men continued to dominate clerical and secretarial roles. They maintained account books, in addition to performing stenographic duties, and were known for their exemplary penmanship (Lowe, 1980:362). Many laboured long hours at their "secretary" desks, which housed their files. As world trade expanded in the 15th and 16th centuries, secretaries often attained an elevated status and held prominent positions. Men continued to dominate the secretarial field until the late 1880s (Davies, 1982:9).

During the industrial expansion at the turn of the century, businesses faced a massive increase in paperwork (Davies, 1982:28). More and more women entered the office workforce in various clerical roles, and they adapted well to new technologies such as the adding machine, telephone and typewriter. Many women held, or aspired to hold, positions as secretaries. They attended secretarial schools and worked to attain superior skills. World War I saw an influx of women into office work, thereby firmly establishing the female image of the secretary (Waymark, 1997:107). By the mid-1930s, the number of men with the title secretary had dwindled. Women dominated the office workforce (Davies, 1982:167). Some were promoted from stenography pools, some were graduates of business colleges or secretarial schools, but

all were seeking the professional status and pay previously enjoyed by their male counterparts.

Secretarial titles have changed to indicate the nature of the work done. Secretarial status titles frequently included "personal" or "private". Today, secretaries are more commonly known as administrative assistants, office coordinators, executive assistants, and office managers. These changing titles indicate that secretaries are using computers, the Internet and other office technologies to perform information management functions in the modern office. Secretaries' roles and responsibilities extend beyond being typists or assistants to "the boss". Secretaries are often expected to write business correspondence, plan meetings, organise data using spreadsheet and database management software, interact with clients, vendors and the general public, supervise the office and other staff, handle purchasing and even train other workers. The influence of the information age and computer technology fundamental to improving office productivity, as well as the redefining of the role of management, has brought about significant changes in the training of secretaries and office administrators (Hennebach, 1989:44).

2.2.1 The secretarial and office administration profession

Secretaries are the hub through which information has to pass and through which information and documentation is distributed (Waymark, 1997:108). They deal with everyone from the company's employees and managers, its board and committees, auditors and lawyers. Externally, they are the bridge between the company and its stakeholders. The reasons why so prominent a site of work has received so little attention are complex and varied. Secretarial work has been described as one of the most persistently gendered of all occupations. It has been characterised as a "ghetto occupation" with three key features: low status and poor pay, narrow and feminised job content and poor promotion prospects (Truss et al., 2013:349).

However, developments over the years have shown that the work of secretaries and office administrators, often considered as routine and basic, requires a greater level of complexity than previously recognised (Biebuyck, 2006:11). Star and Strauss (1999:14), in their study of "invisible work", found that background work that may appear as idle gossip between secretaries may in fact be developing networks of mutual cooperation. Research undertaken by Waymark (1997:112) on the progress of secretaries in the workplace, and by Ridgeway (1982:17) on career pathing, found that secretaries used secretarial work as a foundation for career progression in fields of tourism, personnel management and training.

Since the commencement of secretarial and administrative work there has been a strong focus on language, communication skills and writing practice. In *Personnel Today* (2003:7) the traditional role of the secretary in the UK was considered "dead and buried", as new office managers took responsibility for a broadening range of functions in the organisation. The study discussed in *Personnel Today* (2003:7) found that administrative staff and secretaries who only take dictation, do shorthand and answer their employers' telephones are in the minority. More often, secretaries deal with office management, recruitment, and managing other staff. Many also take responsibility for organising company events, organising conferences, and writing daily reports. Technology such as email and mobile phones has surpassed the traditional "gatekeeper" role of personal assistants, enabling them to broaden their skills and fill the gaps left by redundancies of the economic downturn (*Personnel Today*, 2003:7).

For many women, opportunities for employment are limited to secretarial positions. In a James Madison Constitutional Law lecture, Sandra Day O'Connor points out that for many talented women, secretarial work offers employment in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as medicine or law (O'Connor, 1991:1549). There are many cases of talented women rising through the ranks from secretarial positions. For example, in 1989, Rebekah Brooks[2] started out as a secretary on the British *News of the World* newspaper, but was eventually employed as the first female editor of *The Sun*. She is widely considered as one the most leading and influential women in Britain (Evans, 2014).

Truss et al. (2013:355,359) found that many secretaries are doing managerial work, although not necessarily being paid accordingly. Changes to the role of the secretary are clearly linked to advances in technology and new requirements for secretaries to manage these new technologies in the office, such as spreadsheets, email, and electronic social media. Truss and colleagues found that training prospects have improved for some secretaries, who receive skills-focused training to keep their technical skills up to date. The overall findings of Truss and colleagues' research project undertaken on secretarial work in the twenty-first century was that there were some improvements in salaries and qualifications, which suggest a degree of upskilling and an improvement in the status of some secretarial workers (Truss et al., 2013:361). James (2013:13-15) describes the role of office administrators and secretaries as being the "memory banks" of organisations. While their work comprises a predominantly supportive function, it requires resourcefulness, initiative and tact.

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[2] Rebekah Brooks was the editor of the *News of the World* when illegal phone hacking was carried out by the newspaper. She was cleared of all charges in 2014 following a criminal trial at the Old Bailey.

In legal and medical fields the skills of secretaries, office administrators and office managers are highly regarded. For example, Holten-Møller and Vikkelsø (2012:35) argue that by whatever term the work is described, "secretarial work is something that cannot be performed by everyone". Secretarial work is rarely regarded as "knowledge work"; the secretary is more often thought of as someone who links clients with software or who answers telephones and types. In contrast to this, the medical secretary is involved with articulation work that supports the dispersed activities of clinical work. Medical secretaries are involved in managing information in the collaborative electronic information system, supporting the administration work required for the diagnosis of patients, and examining, interpreting and monitoring the follow up. Holten-Møller and Vikkelsø (2012:43) contend that the medical secretary is positioned between the "enmeshed practices" of administrative and clinical work.

Legal secretaries are also held in high regard within the legal profession. The title "legal secretary" is a defined job in the practice of law. Legal secretaries typically assist lawyers and advocates by preparing and filing legal documents, such as appeals or motions. Sandra Day O'Connor similarly began her career as a legal secretary, as the only position offered to her at the time (despite her legal qualifications) (Bodine, 1983:1396).

2.2.2 The training of secretaries and office administrators

There is a notable lack of attention paid to the work and training of office administrators and secretaries (Truss et al., 2013:349). Secretarial training originated as young women entered the workplace as typists during World War I. Training usually occurred after the young women had completed their schooling; they enrolled in specialist secretarial training colleges. Many secretaries continued to receive on-the-job training at their places of employment. The development of secretarial education developed from very practical training, to training that consisted of single subject examinations. The skills required by secretaries have thus had a long history of being taught as distinct subjects, and the separation of the practical and theoretical components of the training of secretaries goes back some time (Waymark, 1997:107).

In the early twentieth century, clerical work was considered a bridge from the working class to the middle class. Many clerical workers therefore preferred to be called "secretaries", as the term had connotations of a higher status, and was also distinct from the more mechanical role of the stenographer (Solberg, 2014:17-18). However, for many employers the work was "mechanical", and this focus on the "mechanics" – and later the technology of writing – meant that employers' attention was on the secretaries' abilities to transmit or record

communication by mechanical means, in the form of shorthand and typing, rather than on the multiple and complex literacies associated with this work. The focus on the "mechanics" caused the work of secretaries to become undervalued (Russon, 1983:32). Russon (1983:33) believes that secretaries require a high level of competence in language (including mastery of several languages), implicit and explicit communication, technical and business communication, interpretations of communication, and knowledge of how organisations are operated and managed. However, the language and communication practices were given little attention in secretarial training, so that this underpinning knowledge of the secretary became hidden within the business organisation (Russon, 1983:33). Thus, the work of secretaries and office administrators is often regarded as "functionally invisible" as it is considered routine and in the background (Star & Strauss, 1999:21).

Much of the early training of secretaries and clerical workers took place on the job, and since the work was considered routine, the training offered in training colleges developed haphazard programmes of single subjects and only prepared individuals for basic office work (Waymark, 1997:107). Training usually emphasised the mechanical communication skills of shorthand and typing required by secretaries. The teaching and learning strategies for the training of secretaries were project based, with lists of units and targets. Students were required to use background notes to work through the units, and lessons concentrated on practising past examination papers for word processing and typewriting (Waymark, 1997:116). Russon (1983:34) argued that the emphasis on typing, shorthand and "operating techniques of the new technology" perpetuated the narrowness of the training of secretaries. The weaknesses of curricula developed for secretarial training were that they trained secretaries to do a job instead of training students to apply knowledge to other dimensions and skills beyond the job at hand (Russon, 1983:35). There was a need for future training to include a broader range of practices and knowledge areas (Russen, 1983:35).

Research undertaken by Ridgeway (1983:81) shows that degree programmes for secretaries were eventually introduced at colleges in the UK, and provided a high standard of expertise in the managerial, interpersonal and professional skills relevant to the work of secretaries. The degree programmes included studies on the nature of business corporations and their functions, and of the practices for collecting, processing and communicating information and the development of information systems. Studies also included consideration of the high level of technological change and its impact on organisations. Ridgeway (1983:80) identified that advanced education was being provided for secretaries in behavioural, financial, management, legal, economic and organisational studies, based on the principle that the role of the secretary

comprises components of management skills. With the technological developments taking place at the time, there were opportunities for new managerial positions for secretaries.

Further studies (Waymark, 1997:113) revealed that the training for secretaries needed to include word processing or typewriting skills, composition of business letters, telephone work, filing and photocopying, text processing, and consultation and dealing with people skills. Secretaries were required to produce accurate work and to compose business correspondence on their own and on their manager's behalf. Knowledge of electric typewriters, audio machines and word processors was required (Waymark, 1997:107). With the changing roles of advanced technology and the need for flexible and specialised skills in the workplace, the training of secretaries developed in response to these needs (Tench, 2003:430).

Recent research with members of the Global Personal Assistants (PA) Network (Truss et al., 2013:359) who offer professional support and personal development training for office professionals, comprising administrators, executive assistants, secretaries and personal assistants, found that the title of "secretary" is in decline. It is being replaced with titles that "may be perceived to enjoy higher status", such as personal or executive assistant, suggesting that the status of the work may be rising (Truss et al., 2013:359). The findings also showed that the most of the 1 011 respondents appeared well qualified, and those occupying senior positions were earning management-equivalent salaries. The majority of the respondents agreed that having a professionally recognised qualification would elevate the status of the occupation (Truss et al., 2013:355). Those who had received additional training while on the job reported receiving skills-focused training, such as on information technology software, interpersonal skills, time management and managing others (Truss et al., 2013:357).

The above research raises issues over the complexity of secretarial work and the simplicity of what is being taught, in particular the high levels of context dependent content and skills.

2.3 The training of secretaries and office administrators in South Africa

The development of the Diploma in OM in South Africa was strongly influenced by the dominant discourse outlined above. The development of the qualification is an attempt to "rebrand" secretaries as office administrators with expertise in information technology and human resource management, or as paralegals. The "rebranding" involved a shift away from the communication-based, "feminised" conceptions of secretarial work towards fields with assumed higher status.

As discussed in section 1.2 the training of secretaries in South Africa takes place in the workplace, at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, and at universities of technology. The South African Colleges for Advanced Technical Education offered secretarial training which continued until the 1970s when these institutions became technikons. In 1990 the qualification became known as the National Diploma in Secretarial Office Administration, but eventually the title "Secretarial" was replaced in 1992 when it became known as the National Diploma in Business Administration. This change in nomenclature was concomitant with international trends in re-imagining the role of secretaries as high-level administrators. Business administration is a field of business entrepreneurship, rather than office administration, and eventually the name was changed to National Diploma: Commercial Administration.

The technikon system, from which the universities of technology emerged, was regulated by the convenor system policy (DoE, 1997b:20) which stipulated that it was necessary for a convenor technikon to receive approval for the new or revised curriculum from all the other technikons. The consequences of this system were that in the late 1990s it was agreed that the programme would be called the National Diploma in OM; therefore on a national level the current National Diploma in OM curriculum offered at universities of technology has similar or the same syllabi. This change in nomenclature attempted to shift the focus from the role of secretaries to the role of office administrators with expertise in information technology, business, and human resources management. (The current National Diploma in OM curriculum will be discussed in Chapter 4.)

In 2007 the South African Department of Education promulgated a new framework, the Higher Education Qualifications Framework, to establish standards for higher education qualifications. The phase one process of the South Africa Council on Higher Education Implementation Plan known as the Category B curriculum revision, allowed for the revision of the curricula that originated with the Convenor Technikon system (CHE, 2011:4). This process was completed in 2013 and the recurriculated curricula were submitted for review in June 2014. (The recurriculated Diploma in OM will be discussed in Chapter 6.)

Secretarial and administrative work is seldom regarded as significant work, but in many organisations the role of a secretary is considered indispensable, and the company secretary is considered to have a "pivotal role to play in every organisation in guidance and advice to the board" (Wolpert, 2011:36). In an address to Chartered Secretaries Southern Africa, Wolpert, a chartered accountant in South Africa, argued for the significance of the role of the company

secretary in advising the board of the company of the risks facing the organisation. In this regard the company secretary retains vestiges of the early role of the "keeper of secrets" (Biebuyck, 2006:10) and is able to provide guidance and information on the processes for the effective management of an organisation (Wolpert, 2011:37).

Management and business studies are classified as "soft applied" disciplines based on Biglan's (1973:195-203) classification of disciplines. These studies draw from so called soft disciplines such as communication studies, as well as applied disciplines such as marketing. Typical assessment practices include essay writing, project-based assignments, and peer- and self-assessment in order to enhance practical skills and self-reflection (Neumann et al., 2002:409). The design of the curriculum facilitates the transfer of knowledge between higher education and the workplace as it needs to assist students to develop an understanding of the subject matter and to develop the positive self-worth and reflective skills required in the workplace and for life-long learning (Yorke & Knight, 2006:5).

Programmes developed to train secretarial and clerical workers have been strongly influenced by dominant thinking about secretarial work, namely, that such work is routine and unskilled. These misunderstandings grow out of dominant discourses that have devalued the tools and labour of writing – the very foundation of secretarial and clerical work (Boyer & England, 2008:241). The stereotype of the secretary as merely reproducing the words and ideas of others assumes and perpetuates a simplified notion of literacy, writers and writing technologies that is out of step with current scholarship in literacy and communication (Solberg, 2014:3).

The findings of the Higher Education South Africa report (Griesel & Parker, 2009:3) on the employability of graduates revealed that there is an extensive gap between employers' expectations of graduates and the situation they actually find when graduates enter the workplace. The largest gap was found to be the ability of graduates to find and access information, which was regarded as the most significant, together with written communication skills and the ability to use information (Griesel & Parker, 2009:11). Another significant gap between the expectations of employers and the situation when graduates enter the workplace was the understanding of the realities of economics and business (Griesel & Parker, 2009:12). Research conducted on the business-writing practices in a secretarial curriculum revealed that expertise in business writing, and information and communications technology skills were considered vital for graduates entering the workplace (Hollis-Turner, 2008:108).

2.4 Knowledge blindness

The focus of higher education is the preparation of graduates for lifelong learning, active citizenship and employment readiness for working in knowledge economies. The rise of communications technology and new information is proclaimed as "democratizing the creation of knowledge" (Maton, 2014:1). This has contributed to the view that anyone with access to the Internet has "all the world's knowledge at their fingertips" (Friedman, 2006:178).

Knowledge is therefore considered a central feature of modern societies, but the analysis does not extend to "what that knowledge is, its forms and effects" (Maton, 2014:2). Knowledge blindness is exacerbated in new fields of study where knowledge bases are not clearly defined. While the outcomes of these new fields of study may be specified, the knowledge bases may be unclear. Furthermore, much research on education obscures knowledge as an object of study. Over the past decades studies on psychology and sociology have had a profound influence on education research (Freebody et al., 2008:193). Sociological approaches usually focus on knowers (Howard & Maton, 2011:192) and the forms of knowledge learned are often dismissed by psychological approaches which usually focus on the generic process of learning (Maton, 2013:9). Transfer theories and research often explore forms of knowing rather than knowledge itself (Bransford & Swartz, 1999:62). Knowledge is often not present in the research of educational technology which focuses on issues of integration, teacher characteristics, systems and other factors relating to the use of information and communications technologies (Howard & Maton, 2011:193). Cultural and social studies reduced knowledge to identifying the social power on which it is based (Maton, 2013:9).

This has resulted in "knowledge blindness" and attempts to establish definitions of knowledge obscure the differences within knowledge itself (Maton, 2014:2-3). Educational research is also guilty of reducing knowledge to knowing and a predisposition towards constructivist relativism, which leaves knowledge under researched (Maton, 2014:4). Constructivism views knowledge as states of consciousness resident within the learner and reduces knowledge to an object of study (Maton, 2013:9). Constructivists' theories of learning have reduced different knowledge practices to logic of learning, so that what is being learned is of little importance. In this way the "relations within" knowledge are ignored (Maton, 2014:7). In teaching and learning, the fluctuations between "traditional" and "constructivist" pedagogies, which are widespread across the curriculum, are reflections of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:7).

2.5 Emerging knowledge bases for the curriculum for office administrators and office managers

In an age where there is a proliferation of expert occupations, the knowledge that underpins the curriculum of professions is of particular significance (Young & Muller, 2014:5). In the academic context, practical knowledge is not usually considered as powerful knowledge but it has significance in professional practice and in professional or vocational higher education. Professional and vocational curricula need to address both the specific academic practices of the underpinning discipline to ensure a strong basis for practice, and the work-related practices of the profession to develop an understanding of the field of practice (Shay & Steyn, 2015:4, forthcoming). This is not as straightforward as it might seem, as it is difficult to access practical knowledge outside its context of use as knowledge developed in practice is often tacit, and is acquired in a more social way (Winberg et al., 2013:106).

Disciplinary and practical knowledge domains are distinct, as several curriculum theorists have pointed out (e.g., Bernstein, 2000; Muller, 2009; Maton & Moore, 2010; Young & Muller, 2010). Epistemological access (Morrow, 2009:1) to these different knowledge domains requires academics to consider when disciplinary or practical knowledge is required in professional curricula, how these knowledge domains relate to one another and the principles for selecting them for inclusion in higher education academic programmes. All professionally oriented education should provide students with the disciplinary knowledge that supports professional practice (Muller, 2009:214). As disciplinary knowledge usually underpins complex practice, there is typically curricular movement from the disciplines to practice in professional programmes. Winberg et al. (2013:113) argue that whether it is an early or later introduction in actual or simulated forms of the practical knowledge component into the curriculum, "there should be a clear understanding of the professional knowledge system". Curriculum developers should not presume that disciplinary and practical knowledge are interchangeable or their sequencing is unimportant (Winberg et al., 2013:112).

The process of "double recontextualisation" (Barnett, 2006:149) describes the process of developing professional curricula that involves the recontextualisation of both disciplinary and practical knowledge into a curriculum. This process understands the content and structure of a professional programme as "one that both shifts the discourse of practice from its contextual base and relocates it within a university, and one that shifts the discourse of disciplinary knowledge towards an understanding of the world" (Winberg et al., 2013:109). Thus "students can learn from the disciplines, as well as learn about, and from, their future work practice" (Winberg et al., 2013:109).

2.5.1 Pedagogies for professional education

The pedagogy for professional curricula concerns teaching, learning and acquiring a broad range of attributes, knowledge and practices to encourage continued learning and career advancement (Pegg et al., 2012:4). Barnett (2006:152) argues that vocational pedagogy essentially involves boundary crossing between bodies of knowledge, people, languages and identities. Like professional curricula, professional pedagogies need to "face both ways" (Barnett, 2006:152), inwards towards the specific academic practices of the discipline and "outwards towards external fields of practice" (Bernstein, 2000:55).

Academics in the soft applied disciplines, such as business studies, display a preference for teaching, discussions, debates, and for contributions from experienced practitioners, with substantial contact hours for comprehensive attention to both theory and practical skills (Neumann et al., 2002:411-412). Students are required to apply problem-solving abilities and they need a capability for written and oral expression (Neumann et al., 2002:413). In terms of pedagogy and student identity, the curriculum should

> … value community and other resources, and also one that cultivates the context independent nature of knowledge and the formation of intellectual identities as the most appropriate capitals to the higher education field (Clegg, 2011:102).

In the South African context the debate regarding the role of higher education incorporates views of higher education's becoming part of a global knowledge society and economy (Griesel & Parker, 2009:3). The response worldwide has been seen in a renewed interest in pedagogy and an emphasis on student-centred learning (Harvey, 2003a:2). Both government and employers see the importance of graduates' possessing "a range of attributes that empower them as lifelong learners" (Harvey, 2003a:2). If prospective secretaries and office managers are to be awarded a higher education qualification, this would be intended to prepare them with the "technical and generic skills for success in their future workplace" (Freudenberg et al., 2012:177) as part of lifelong learning development to enhance employment possibilities and to achieve personal learning objectives (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)**,** 2011:5).

2.5.2 Work-based learning in Office Management curricula

Work experience is seen as an important way to enable students to connect their academic studies and the workplace and to acquaint themselves with the skills required in the work setting (Harvey, 2003b:9). Work experience can take many forms, varying from traditional placements, part-time employment and "live" project work (Harvey, 2003a:9). Higher

education curricula should involve students in complex work-based activities that promote reflection and risk assessment (Moreland, 2004:8). Work-integrated learning projects such as placements and internships are recognised by employers, graduates and students as effective in enhancing the employability of graduates (Lowden et al., 2011:vii.).

A report by Johnson and Burden (2003:39) argues that many of the employability skills that employers are seeking can only be learned

> … in "real life" situations, even on a temporary basis such as work placements of two or three weeks … there is a limit to the extent to which educational establishments can "teach" the necessary skills and attributes, even where extensive efforts are made to simulate the work situation.

Students need to relate the general to the particular in different contexts; learning for the workplace must include "learning in the workplace but that learning cannot be limited to the workplace" (Wheelahan, 2009:240). Wheelahan (2009:240) critiques both competency-based training and constructivism as being unable to "theorise the relationship between theoretical knowledge and workplace practice" or the complementary roles of higher education institutions and the workplace, and the types of knowledge available to each. Both competency-based training and constructivism fail to identify the underpinning knowledge of practice or of outcomes.

In the context of universities of technology in South Africa, the term "cooperative education" describes the "placement of students in appropriate workplaces for the purpose of gaining work experience in their chosen fields or disciplines, with the cooperation of potential employers" (Winberg et al., 2012:4). This is learning integrated with work and involves a structured curriculum combining relevant work experience with academic study. It is a valuable tool for providing interns with exposure to the world of work. Work-based or work-integrated learning is a term that describes curricular approaches and pedagogic and assessment practices across a variety of academic disciplines that integrate workplace interests and formal learning (Winberg et al., 2012:4). In South Africa, the term "experiential learning" is often used synonymously with cooperative education. The term work-integrated learning defines an approach to career-focused education which comprises theoretical forms of learning. These forms of learning are appropriate for "technical/professional qualifications, problem-based learning, project-based learning and workplace learning" (Winberg et al., 2012:5).

The aim of work-integrated learning is to attempt to bring two worlds closer: the world of higher education and the world of professional practice. The world of higher education consists of academic study, disciplines, syllabi, assessments, qualifications and policy constraints. The world of professional practice comprises employment, work, salaries, clients, customers, colleagues, partners and deadlines. Attempts to bring the two worlds closer require a range of curricular, pedagogic and assessment practices. Some of these involve theoretical, problem- and project-based activities, as well as practical aspects such as in-service training and internships (Winberg et al., 2012:7).

2.5.3 Graduate attributes for office administrator and office managers

Research has established that secretaries, while carrying out routine tasks, are also required to have tact and discretion as in many instances they are dealing with highly confidential work (Waymark, 1997:112). Loyalty is considered essential if the secretary and her employer are to constitute a team, as well as personal attributes of reliability, calmness, tact and discretion (Waymark, 1997:112,114). In the South African context, the findings of the Higher Education South Africa report on the employability of graduates (Griesel & Parker, 2009:3) revealed that there is an extensive gap in employers' expectations of graduates in respect of their selecting suitable information to deal with problems, planning and executing tasks independently, adopting a suitable approach to solving problems, and checking and evaluating their own work (Griesel & Parker, 2009:13). Regarding the personal and interactive skills of graduates, the biggest gap concerned openness, flexibility and negotiation, while the smallest gap was the willingness to learn (Griesel & Parker, 2009: 15).

The South African Council on Higher Education reports that one of the requirements for the enrichment of the curriculum is the development of graduate attributes not connected to core disciplinary learning, but to life skills and the basis for critical citizenship and, in this regard, refers to the following:

> In South Africa, there is strong interest in the concept of social responsiveness and how experience with it can be included in educational programmes, to foster cultural sensitivity and civic engagement … and recommends that all institutions should take the opportunity afforded by curriculum reform to introduce such initiatives in their programmes (CHE, 2013b:96).

In line with the national requirement, many universities have developed mission statements with the objective that students will be technologically adept as well as eminently employable based on their solid disciplinary knowledge and capabilities to apply this knowledge. Students should also be socially responsive and be able to apply their knowledge and skills to address

social needs in South Africa. Students should be innovative in their thinking and actions, and should be environmentally conscious (CPUT, 2012:8). Research on secretarial graduates who had undertaken a six-month period of internship, found that interns entering the workplace should tackle new work with enthusiasm, and should display good listening and human relations skills; they should have the ability to solve problems, be assertive and adapt to the work environment. Interns should have perseverance and be able to work independently and make decisions (Hollis-Turner, 2008:76). While these descriptors are important, they are extremely generic and would fit almost any professional context. The "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3) that characterises much curriculum development work, is particularly prevalent in secretarial education.

There are, however, areas where an emerging awareness of knowledge is evident. For example, research that draws on the work of Bourdieu (1993), Foucault (1970), Habermas (1973, 1978), Piaget (1980) and Bernstein (2000) distinguishes everyday knowledge from disciplinary knowledge. There have also been attempts to describe types of academic knowledge, for example, Biglan (1973:201-202) highlights the significance of knowledge by describing what is similar to and different between the subject matter of disciplines. Biglan identifies three dimensions for the classification of disciplines, namely hard–soft, pure–applied and life–non-life. The life–non-life dimension has been largely ignored, but the two remaining dimensions organised disciplines into four categories. To each category, Biglan associated disciplines and defined the character of their subject matter (Biglan, 1973:202). However, Biglan's applied psychology theory does not provide the means for the analysis of the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum nor the conceptual tools to make this possible.

On the other hand, Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002:214) and DiSessa's (1993:112) phenomenological primitives provide analytical tools, but the "subjectivist doxa often reasserts itself in models of knowing" (Maton, 2014:8). DiSessa (1993:112) argues that phenomenological primitives represent a hypothetical knowledge structure described as "rather small knowledge structures, typically involving configurations of only a few parts… recognized in a physical system or in the system's behaviour or hypothesized behaviour". Other areas, such as Bernstein's (2000) knowledge structures, analyse knowledge, but require development to theorise the structuring principles of knowledge (Shay, 2013:568). LCT was developed as a construction for the investigation of knowledge and education. It is allied to social realism and lays the foundations for overcoming "knowledge blindness" so that knowledge is not reduced to knowing (Maton, 2014:8). This is the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis.

2.6 Theoretical framework: understanding the knowledge base for Office Management to promote graduate employability

Much work has been done on disciplinary knowledge and on curricula but it is insufficient for the purposes of this study. For this research project it was necessary to find a language to describe the knowledge base of office management expertise nationally and internationally. The theoretical framework makes use of the conceptualising approach of LCT (Maton, 2000) for the analysis of secretarial curricula. This is a new theory that is still undergoing expansion especially of the Semantics dimension. In this regard other theoretical resources have been drawn on particularly with reference to practice-based knowledge.

Bernstein's theory of pedagogy and theory of knowledge (1975, 1999, 2000) describe the conceptualising of different knowledge structures and provide a foundation for the legitimation dimensions (Maton, 2000, 2004). The legitimation dimensions of "Autonomy", the Semantic codes of "semantic density" and "semantic gravity" and concept of "Specialisation" are used to "enable movement between macro, meso and micro levels of analysis" (Maton, 2004:86). Languages of legitimation are described as "messages referring to the overriding basis of achievement and the organising principles underpinning these messages which are conceptualised as legitimation codes" (Howard & Maton, 2011:196). The purpose of using this theory for this research project is that it makes possible the analysis of "a whole field, groups of positions, specific institutions or disciplines, classrooms, and so forth" (Maton 2004:86).

The effectiveness of LCT is that it expands on Bernstein's (2000:25) pedagogic device that frames the relationship between the field where knowledge is produced, where knowledge is recontextualised into curriculum, and the field where the knowledge is taught and learned, namely reproduction (Shay, 2013:567). It therefore enables the examination of who decides on the knowledge bases of the secretarial curriculum, and what comprises the knowledge bases of secretarial practice in order to determine the knowledge base of office work.

The development of the conceptualising framework directed the development of the multi-method research design to establish the knowledge bases of secretarial curricula and the foundation of legitimacy of these programmes for the fostering of the employability of the secretarial graduate. The methodology used, for example, a Delphi survey to obtain expert opinion, was strongly influenced by the theoretical framework to create opportunities for the testing of knowledge and learning from the experts as they refined their opinions and arrived at consensus. This enabled the identification of what the Delphi panel viewed as the

legitimate knowledge, practices and attributes of office managers. The theoretical framework was similarly used to shape the interviews conducted with academics that teach secretaries and administrators locally and internationally. The research design was thus shaped by the understanding of LCT.

In this section, the reasons for the choice of LCT as a theoretical framework, cumulative knowledge building, and the dimensions of Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation are discussed.

2.6.1 Why the choice of Legitimation Code Theory as a theoretical framework?

The focus on changes to curriculum requires a framework capable of seeing knowledge as an object of study and capable of exploring change over time, both of which are enabled by LCT. LCT assimilates views from the methods of Bourdieu and Bernstein to create a framework for examining the structuring of knowledge and practices within pedagogical and intellectual fields (Maton, 2000; Moore & Maton, 2001; Maton & Muller, 2007). LCT analyses disciplines as

> … fields of struggle over status and resources in which the beliefs and practices of actors embody competing claims to legitimacy or messages as to what should be considered the dominant basis of achievement within the field. These "languages of legitimation" are analysed in terms of their underlying structuring principles or *legitimation codes* (Carvalho et al., 2009:487).

Maton develops his theory of languages of legitimation to denote ways in which agents legitimate their fields, and the explicit or tacit ways in which they "represent themselves and the field in their beliefs and practices … as embodying claims for knowledge, status, and resources" (Maton 2004:83). Explicit languages of legitimation take place when agents make assertions when "advocating a position", and tacit languages of legitimation are entrenched in "routinised or institutionalised practices" (Maton, 2004:83).

LCT provides insight into the "recontextualization of theoretical knowledge for vocational purposes" (Shay, 2013:577), which includes substantial curriculum and pedagogical challenges. According to Bernstein (1975:85), "curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge" and he describes his pedagogic device as an "arena of struggle" which includes three fields of practice, being the field of knowledge production, the field of knowledge reproduction, and the field of knowledge recontextualisation (Bernstein, 1990:206). In this context, curriculum is defined as recontextualised knowledge (Shay, 2013:571), as knowledge is decontextualised from its production site and recontextualised into a curriculum. This

recontextualising process requires that choices be made regarding which field of knowledge production should be chosen, which disciplines are more essential in a professional curriculum for the fostering of the graduate, and how much theory and how many practical components are legitimate for this field of practice (Shay, 2013:577). LCT provides the framework, with essential principles for identifying legitimacy in the field of practice of office administration.

The theoretical framework for this research study is based on Maton's (2014:18) principles of Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation. The utilisation of these concepts from within LCT is appropriate. The principle of Autonomy reveals the broad discourses regarding the history, mission, and other interests of the institution which control the choices made for the curriculum. It is relevant given the nature of courses in OM facing both inwards to academia and outwards to the workplace and the shifting nature of these relations over time. The principle of Semantics investigates the logic of the curriculum and what gives it meaning. This is relevant given the contested history over the degrees of context dependence and complexity of what is taught and learned and the possible evacuation of higher and more complex principles of knowledge from curriculum in recent times. The principle of Specialisation investigates what is the ideal knower for the field of office administration. It enables an investigation of what attributes, values, knowledge and skills should comprise this curriculum for the enhancing of the employability of the graduate. A discussion on the ideal knower does not imply only the social but also an epistemic relationship. This is relevant for exploring the basis of achievement in terms of relative emphasis on knowledge or skills or dispositions, and for reflecting the shifting emphasis on these aspects of secretarial work over time, between a skill set and being more a "people person".

The utilisation of the concepts of LCT is more valuable than concepts such as "practical knowledge" and "disciplinary knowledge" in the context of this research project as the latter concepts do not show the organising principles of each of these knowledge practices or how they might change when brought into relation within a vocational and professional curriculum. For example, the concept of semantic density is used to highlight the complexity of secretarial work and the simplicity of what is taught, whilst the concept of semantic gravity is used to highlight the issues of secretaries and administrators being trained into skills that are too context dependent.

2.6.2 Cumulative knowledge building in the professional curriculum

Maton (2013:10) refers to using "Bernstein's blueprints for cumulative knowledge-building to cumulatively build on Bernstein's knowledge" as "an ongoing concern of Legitimation Code Theory". Bernstein (2000) identifies two structures, where he describes the conceptualising of different structuring of knowledge. The first is vertical discourse associated with the traditional academic disciplines and refers to "specialised symbolic structures of explicit knowledge" (Bernstein, 2000:160). It is scholarly, professional and educational knowledge where "meaning is less dependent on relevance to its context and instead is related to other meanings hierarchically" (Maton, 2009:44). The second is horizontal discourse, which refers to everyday, practical or "common-sense" knowledge and entails a set of strategies which are local, segmentally organised, context specific and dependent (Bernstein, 2000:157). Within vertical discourses, Bernstein distinguishes between "hierarchical" knowledge structures illustrated by the sciences as a "coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organized", which "attempts to create very general propositions and theories which integrate knowledge at lower levels" (Bernstein, 2000:160-161), and a horizontal knowledge structure which is illustrated by "the humanities and social sciences" (Bernstein, 2000:160). The horizontal knowledge structure is "a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and criteria for the construction and circulation of texts" (Bernstein, 2000:161).

Vertical or disciplinary knowledge structures provide students with the fundamental knowledge for professional practice. Bernstein (2000:52) describes applied disciplines as regions of knowledge that face towards the field of practice. In applied disciplines, singulars are "recontextualised", that is, codified into "larger units which operate both in the intellectual field of disciplines and in the field of external practice" and are "the interface between disciplines (singulars) and the technologies that they make possible" (Bernstein, 2000:52). Bernstein's description of conceptualising different structures of knowledge highlights the way knowledge progresses over time. Hierarchical knowledge structures "develop through new knowledge integrating and subsuming previous knowledge", while horizontal knowledge structures "develop through adding on another segmented approach or topic area" (Maton, 2009:45).

Maton (2009:45) argues that it is possible to distinguish between Bernstein's (2000) hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures by investigating whether a lesson, unit of study, module, and so on builds upon the knowledge taught in previous lessons through "integration and subsumption or through segmental aggregation". Maton (2009:45) describes

cumulative learning as the "ways in which students' understandings develop over time". Students build on formerly learned knowledge and advance that knowledge into future contexts. The opposite scenario is that of "segmented learning", where such transfer is repressed (Maton, 2009:45). Segmentalism "occurs when knowledge or knowing is so strongly tied to its context that it is only meaningful within that context" (Maton, 2014:106). This knowledge prevents cumulative progress and is reflected in pedagogic practices that contain "a series of discrete ideas or skills rather than cumulative building on previously encountered knowledge" (Maton, 2014:106). This may retard students' capabilities to integrate and extend previous knowledge and experiences for use in future workplaces or further studies. Cumulative learning and knowledge transfer are the foci of education in preparing learners for lifelong learning, the volatile workplace and an unknown future (Maton, 2014:106).

The desire for cumulative knowledge building is evidenced in the aims of higher education programmes to generate ideas that have "utility or appeal beyond the specificities of their originating contexts" (Maton, 2013:8). Academics advocate the requirement for pedagogic practice to have "positive effects that extend beyond the exact conditions of initial learning" (Bransford & Swartz, 1999:61), by enabling students to develop on earlier understandings and transfer learnt knowledge into future contexts (Maton, 2013:8).

Professional curricula are recontextualised regions and competent professional practice needs appropriate disciplinary knowledge for cumulative knowledge building and the advancement of the field of practice. However, "competent practice also implies knowledge about and knowledge within the field of practice" (Winberg et al., 2013:115). Professional programmes therefore involve both disciplinary knowledge and practical expertise (Winberg, et al., 2013:115). Curricula that neglect disciplinary knowledge or do not pay attention to the practical knowledge associated with a field of practice do not provide professional education with a clear professional knowledge system (Winberg et al., 2013:101) and inhibit cumulative knowledge building. The neglect of relevant disciplinary knowledge, especially in the new professions, has been highlighted in the critiques of competency-based training (Wheelahan, 2009:231). Wheelahan (2010:28) argues, especially within professional curricula, that generic competencies are positioned towards markets and not to the fields of practice. This breaks the linkage with disciplinary knowledge completely, changes the relationship between the workplace and the higher education institution, and prevents cumulative knowledge building.

2.6.3 Autonomy

Maton (2005) developed the concept of autonomy from Bourdieu's usage of relative autonomy. However, Maton criticised Bourdieu's theory for demoting position taking to a by-product of the "play of positions" within the field (Maton, 2005:696). Maton (2004:84) argues that all practices and position takings entrench languages of legitimation and that whoever is in control of the legitimation device has the power to set the "rules of the game". This is achieved by making those features that characterise their practices the basis of legitimate accomplishment, participation, status and hierarchy. There is, therefore, a focus on the struggle for control of the device in order to create specific principles of legitimation as the dominant influence. The dominant influence attributes value to certain principles and practices above others, thereby structuring relations hierarchically between positions in the field.

At a macro level, the curriculum framework investigates curriculum autonomy, which provides an understanding of the controlling institutional debates that comprise the logic of the curriculum. The Autonomy codes consist of two fundamental principles: positional autonomy (PA) and relational autonomy (RA). These may be stronger (+) or weaker (-). Maton defines positional autonomy as "the nature of relations between specific positions in the social dimension of a context or field and positions in other contexts" (Maton, 2005:697). This dimension attempts to investigate those who are in control and to establish the relation between the fields outside of the university, such as the marketplace, industry and government. If the university is not autonomous and is controlled from outside by industry, government or the marketplace, then the positional autonomy is weakened (PA-). If the university is controlled by those inside such as the academics, then the positional autonomy is strengthened (PA+) (Maton, 2005:697).

Relational autonomy is defined as "relations between the principles of relation (or ways of working, practices, aims, measures of achievement, etc.) within a context or field and those emanating from other contexts" (Maton, 2005:697). Relational autonomy investigates the origins of these principles which may come from the inside (academic community), in which case the relational autonomy is stronger (RA+), or from the outside (government, industry or marketplace), in which case the relational autonomy is weaker (RA-). Refer to Figure 2.1 for the modalities of Autonomy.
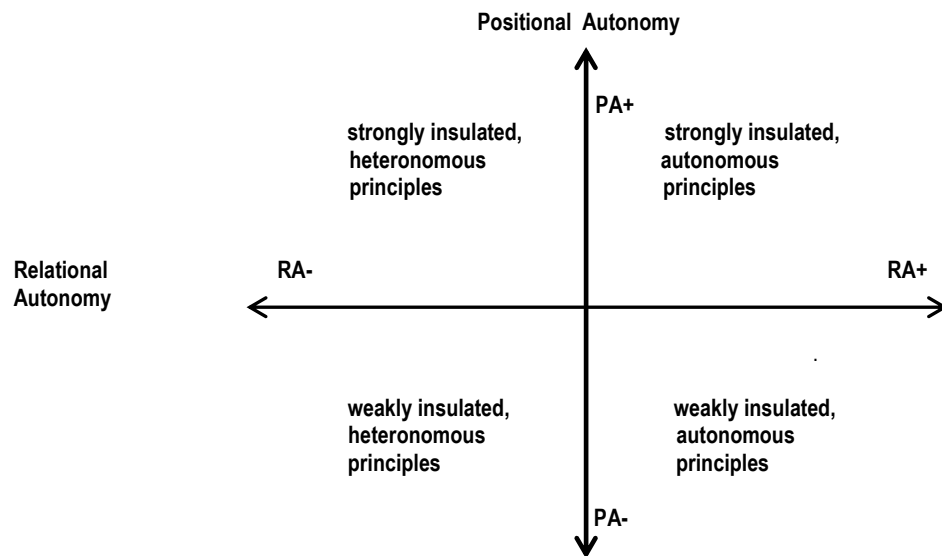
Figure 2.1: Modalities of Autonomy (Maton, 2005:698)

2.6.4 Semantics

Two knowledge structures were identified by Bernstein (2000) for conceptualising different types of knowledge. As described in section 2.6.2, Bernstein identified the vertical discourse associated with the traditional academic disciplines (Bernstein, 2000:160) and the horizontal discourse, which refers to everyday or "common-sense" knowledge (Bernstein, 2000:157). Within vertical discourses Bernstein differentiates between "hierarchical" knowledge structures and "horizontal" knowledge structures (2000:161).

One of the dimensions of the "sociological toolkit for the study of practice" of LCT is that of Semantics (Maton, 2013:10). The Semantic codes are utilised to define the external and internal relations of educational knowledge. *Semantic gravity* (SG) defines the external relations of knowledge practices, as

> … the degree to which meaning relates to its context. Semantic gravity may be relatively stronger (+) or weaker (-) along a continuum of strengths. The stronger the semantic gravity (SG+), the more meaning is dependent on its context; the weaker the gravity (SG-), the less dependent meaning is on its context (Maton, 2013:11).

Semantic density (SD) is described as follows:

> The degree of condensation of meaning within socio-cultural practices, whether these comprise symbols, terms, concepts, phrases, expressions, gestures, clothing, etc. Semantic density may be relatively stronger (+) or weaker (−) along a continuum of strengths. The stronger the semantic

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density (SD+), the more meanings are condensed within practices; the weaker the semantic density (SD−), the less meanings are condensed (Maton, 2013:11).

Maton argues that code combinations for semantic density and semantic gravity are possible, for example, SG+SD+. These relations can be explained as "continua of strengths [that] provide … a topological semantic space, with infinite capacity for gradation" (Maton, 2011:66). This advances the theories of Bernstein, in that it enables the mapping of "shifts in gravity and density" (Shay, 2013:570). Semantic gravity allows for a more exact description of recontextualised knowledge which constitutes a curriculum while semantic density provides a more exact description of the concepts (Shay, 2013:571). Refer to Figure 2.2 for Maton's (2011) Semantic codes of legitimation.
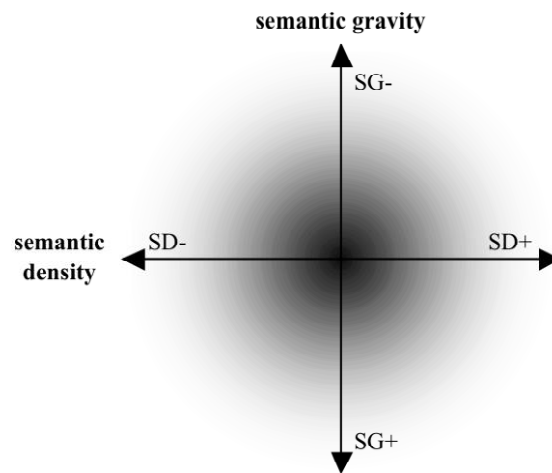
Figure 2.2: Semantic codes of legitimation (Maton, 2011:66)

These Semantic codes aim to provide the means for the identification of the legitimated orders of meaning and the internal and external relations of knowledge practices. For example, when theoretical knowledge is transformed into educational knowledge, but the knowledge of the curriculum is that of the discipline, the semantic gravity continues to be weaker and the semantic density stronger. This is dependent on the curricula and also on whether the context is social or physical science. The "curriculum logic is that of the discipline" (Shay, 2013:574).

2.6.5 Specialisation

Bernstein's (2000) theory of knowledge structures and codes shows the relations between fields or disciplines, while Maton's (2000, 2004, 2014) theory allows for the examination of relations within fields of knowledge. Maton complemented Bernstein's knowledge code with

the knower code concept and the pedagogic device with the epistemic device. Moore and Maton (2001:178) argue that the epistemic device is the pre-condition for the production of knowledge. As with the pedagogic device, those in control of the epistemic device are in control of who may access, produce or impart knowledge.

A dimension of the code known as Specialisation describes what defines something as dissimilar, special and deserving of distinction on the basis that "every practice, belief or knowledge claim is about or oriented towards something and by someone" (Howard & Maton, 2011:196). Specialisation codes can distinguish the "*epistemic relations* (ER) between practices and their object or focus; and *social relations* (SR) between practices and their subject, author or actor" (Howard & Maton, 2011:196). These relations may be more strongly or weakly emphasised in practices and beliefs and visualised on x and y axes of a Cartesian plane. The code describes the "dominant basis of success of a social context", but there is "typically more than one code present" and degrees of "code clash" or "code match" (Howard & Maton, 2011:197). Specialisation codes highlight the questions of: "*what* can be legitimately described as knowledge (epistemic relations); and *who* can claim to be a legitimate knower (social relations)" (Maton, 2014:29). Maton (2014:75) argues that for "every educational knowledge structure there is also an educational knower structure". LCT aims to determine which of these is emphasised in practices and knowledge claims. Refer to Figure 2.3 for the Specialisation codes.

epistemic relations

ER+

knowledge   élite

SR-   SR+
social relations

relativist   knower

ER-
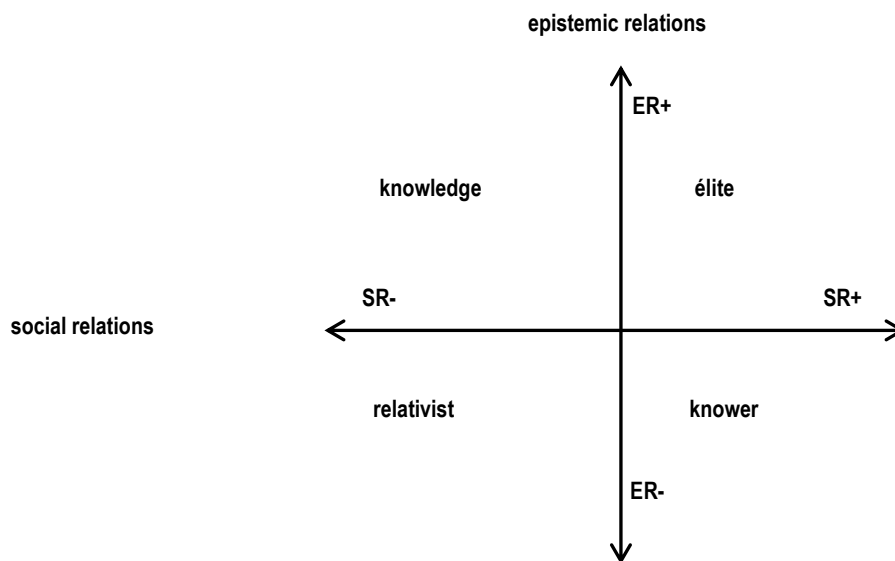
Figure 2.3: Specialisation codes (Maton, 2014:30)

The Specialisation codes are described by Maton (2014:30-31) as:

- *knowledge codes* (ER+, SR-), where possession of specialized knowledge of specific objects of study is emphasized as the basis of achievement, and the attributes of the actors are downplayed;
- *knower codes* (ER-, SR+), where specialized knowledge and objects are less significant and instead the attributes of actors are emphasized as measures of achievement, whether these are viewed as born (e.g. "natural talent"), cultivated (e.g. artistic gaze or "taste") or socially based (e.g. the notion of gendered gaze in feminist standpoint theory);
- *élite codes* (ER+, SR+), where legitimacy is based on both possessing specialist knowledge and being the right kind of knower (here, "élite" refers not to social exclusivity but rather to possessing *both* legitimate knowledge *and* legitimate dispositions); and
- *relativist codes* (ER-, SR-), where legitimacy is determined by neither specialist knowledge nor knower attributes – a kind of "everything goes".

2.7 The conceptual framework for the study of the Office Management curricula

The identification and description of different knowledge domains and knowledge types do not imply cognitive complexity or simplicity. For example, because something is described as "theoretical knowledge", it does not mean it is necessarily cognitively challenging; while something described as "practical knowledge" does not mean it is cognitively simple (Shay, 2013:577). Detailed research, such as numerous interviews with academics and practitioners, would be necessary to establish the level of cognitive complexity of a specific curriculum, together with an extensive study of the course materials, class exercises, summative and formative assessments to develop an understanding of levels of cognitive challenge and complexity. By framing such an investigation within the dimensions of Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation, one can build a clear understanding of the types of knowledge and their levels of complexity and cognitive challenge.

This conceptual framework enabled the analysis of the curricular study of secretarial and office management programmes at macro, meso and micro levels. The principle of Autonomy was used to examine the broad discourses regarding the history, mission and origin of the secretarial curricula and of the stakeholders who control the choices made in the development of the curricula. The Semantic principle was used to examine the logic of the curriculum and that which gives it meaning. The principle of Specialisation was used to investigate what constitutes legitimacy in terms of knowledge and knowers. Table 2.1 is a graphic representation of the conceptual framework for this research study, showing how the research questions are addressed by particular aspects of the framework.

Table 2.1 shows the dimensions of LCT and the research questions they define. The Autonomy dimension was used to investigate who decided on the knowledge bases of the current National Diploma: OM curriculum and the new, recurriculated Diploma OM curriculum. The Semantic dimension was used to investigate the knowledge areas drawn on in the development of Office Management curricula. The Specialisation dimension was used to investigate the attributes necessary for the role of office administrator and office manager.

The research questions provide the focus for achieving the aim of this thesis, which is to determine what attributes, values, knowledge and skills should be included in the OM curriculum, and to establish the knowledge base of the OM curriculum with the objective of enhancing the employability of graduates.

In the next chapter, the research design is explained, including the use of LCT to explain the specific research approach taken. How data was collected to provide detail on curricular decisions, the type of knowledge selected, as well as its levels of cognitive challenge, and the characteristics and attributes of ideal "knowers", are explained.

Table 2.1: Conceptual framework for Office Management curricula

Positional Autonomy PA+ **Relational Autonomy** ←— RA- RA+ —→ . PA-	**Research question 1:** **Who decided on the** **knowledge bases of the OM** **curriculum?**
Semantic Gravity SG- **Semantic Density** ←— SD- SD+ —→ SG+	**Research question 2:** **What knowledge areas were** **drawn on in the** **development of the current** **and new qualifications for** **office administrators?**
Epistemic Relations ER+ knowledge élite **Social Relations** ←— SR- SR+ —→ relativist knower ER-	**Research question 3:** **What attributes are implied** **by the current and new** **qualifications for the role of** **office administrator?**

Overarching research question: What is the knowledge base of OM work?

CHAPTER 3: A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF THE OFFICE MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design, methodology and method of analysis employed to identify the knowledge base of the OM curriculum, as well as the use of LCT to explain the specific research approach taken. Three levels of discussion relate to the research design for the realisation of the conceptual framework, the data collection methodology, and the data capture and analysis process.

The study focuses on a current diploma, the National Diploma in Office Management and a revised Diploma in Office Management. In order to simplify and clarify these differences, the existing diploma is referred to as the "current diploma", while the revised diploma (that has not yet been implemented or received national approval) is referred to as the "new diploma" in OM. This is used as "shorthand" in the document to avoid the longer and more cumbersome nomenclature.

3.2 Research design

The use of LCT determined the multi-method approach used to include the views of graduates, employers, and academics, who were able to bring their own expectations, experiences, concerns and perspectives into the research process. The methods of data collection included Delphi surveys, documentary data from minutes of Develop a Curriculum (DACUM) and curriculum workshops, curricular documents and course material, third-year student and alumni surveys and interview documentation. These sources were used to secure triangulation of data gathering. Triangulation is "the process by which a social phenomenon is observed and measured by various techniques" (Carranza, 1982:81). As more valid and reliable findings are likely to be produced by means of collecting data through numerous techniques, rather than by collecting data from only one source, this study included and produced data from multiple sources.

The Autonomy dimension of LCT was drawn on to analyse the documentary, curricular and interview data to examine the history, origin and mission of the OM curricula to determine decision making with regard to the selection of knowledge bases for the curricula (research question 1). The Delphi survey was designed to determine the knowledge areas which underpin the current OM curriculum, as well as to obtain suggestions for additional content areas that might have been neglected in, or omitted from, the current curriculum in order to advise on the development of the new Diploma: OM (research question 2). The data from

the Delphi surveys, documentary data comprising curricular data, DACUM and curriculum workshop reports, third-year student and alumni surveys, and interviews, were analysed by drawing on the Semantic dimension of LCT to examine the knowledge areas and their associated practices that give the current and new OM curricula meaning.

The design of the Delphi survey also aimed to determine the attributes necessary for the role of the office administrator (research question 3). The data from the Delphi surveys and documentary data of the minutes of the third year students and alumni survey were analysed drawing on the Specialisation dimension to analyse the attributes of the ideal knower, as implied by the current and new OM curricula. The analysis of data produced from a variety of sources utilising the LCT dimensions established the knowledge base of OM work (research question 4). Table 3.1 represents a summary of the data-collection methods and analysis process used for the realisation of the conceptual framework of the OM curriculum.

Table 3.1: Summary of the data collection methods and analysis

Research questions	Data source	Data collection	Data analysis	LCT
1. Who decided on the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum?	Analysis of documentary and curricular data Interviews: 7 x OM academics	Documentary and curricular data: current and new curricula Interview data: current and new curricula data	Statistical and code analysis	Autonomy dimension
2. What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the current and new qualifications for office administrators?	Pilot panel : 10 experts Delphi surveys: 53 experts Documentary analysis: Documentary and curricular data Curricular documentation: core syllabi from 4 international institutions DACUM and curriculum workshops Third-year student and alumni surveys Interviews: 7 x OM academics 6 x academics at an international college	Pilot study Delphi surveys: 3 rounds Documentary data: Documentary and curricular data Core syllabi from 4 International institutions Data from Dacum and curriculum workshops Data from third year and alumni surveys Interview data on current and new curricula Interview data	Statistical and code analysis	Semantic Dimension
3. What attributes are implied by the current and new qualifications for the role of office administrator?	Pilot panel : 10 experts Delphi panel surveys: 53 experts Third year student and alumni surveys	Pilot study Delphi surveys: 3 rounds Data on third year student and alumni surveys	Statistical and code analysis	Specialisation Dimension

4. What is the knowledge base of OM work?

3.3 Data-collection methodology

This section describes the data-collection methodology used in the pilot study, Delphi surveys, and collection of documentary and interview data. The methods were triangulated, which could be described as an epistemological merger between quantitative and qualitative approaches and thus as a "synthesis of sorts" (Jones & LeBaron, 2002:505). This offers the potential for greater diversity of information and greater detail. Primary data, both numeric and textual, was obtained by using surveys, documentary and interview data collection methods. In so doing, descriptive as well as evaluative information was obtained.

3.3.1 Pilot study

To address the research questions, a survey was designed. A survey provides a tool for obtaining information that can then be tabulated and discussed. It can help the researcher obtain information about what people do, and what they think, know, feel or want (Taylor-Powell, 1998:2). A pilot study was undertaken to test the survey instrument on a limited number of participants from the same group for whom the Delphi surveys were intended. An attempt was made to intersperse the more difficult open-ended questions which required commentary, so that these were not all left to the end of the survey. This technique is intended to prevent the respondents' loss of interest and superficial responses to the longer questions (Burgess, 2001:8).

In an attempt to avoid communication misunderstandings that may have arisen from the Delphi survey, the pilot study to test and adjust the Delphi survey and identify any procedural problems was conducted. Data was collected from ten Delphi panel members comprising three academics, four employers of OM graduates and third-year students (interns) undertaking the six-month internship component of the current OM programme, and three graduates of the programme. The questions developed for the survey aimed at investigating the Delphi panel's opinions on the critical skills, personal attributes and curriculum content that would enhance the employability of the OM graduates. The general and personal questions were covered under Sections A and B of the pilot survey (Appendix I) and the rating of the graduate skills essential for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace, under Section C. Section D comprised the subject-specific knowledge and skills of the current National Diploma programme.

Section C included a selection chart of the critical cross-field outcomes (critical skills) of the South African Qualifications Authority, NSB Regulations (Nkomo, 2000:18) and 13 personal attributes from the Employability Skills Framework of the Australian Qualifications

Framework (Bowman, 2010:16). In response to feedback from the respondents of the pilot study, the 13 personal attributes were adapted to include additional personal attributes of significance to the employability of the OM graduate for the round one survey (Appendix J). It was at this stage that the study became focused on the current diploma-level OM curriculum as well as the new OM diploma-level qualification. Questions on the OM degree curriculum were removed, as this qualification would be phased out in the recurriculation process.

3.3.2 Delphi surveys

In order to address the research questions 2, 3 and 4 (What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the OM curriculum? What attributes are implied by the current and new qualifications for the role of office administrator? What is the knowledge base of OM work?), a Delphi research method was utilised. The Delphi approach was created in the 1950s by Dalkey and Helmer. It is a widely used method for achieving convergence of opinions regarding real-world knowledge obtained from experts within specific topic areas (Dalkey, 1969:76). The Delphi approach is useful for exploring the dominant bases of achievement of knowledge practices, and thereby determining the dominant legitimation codes in the field of practice. The focus of this research concerns the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum, with the understanding that appropriate knowledge bases will enhance those attributes associated with employability. The Delphi panel consisted of three types of expert being employers, as well as academics, and graduates with workplace experience.

Delphi is an established method used to harness the opinions of a diverse group of experts (Powell, 2003:376), where inputs are required of individuals with diverse business interests and backgrounds (Preble, 1983:75). It provides both quantitative and qualitative data and has been described as a flexible research technique (Skulmoski et al., 2007:1). Its reliability and validity as an acceptable method of data collection from a selected group has been recognised (Helmer, 1967:4) and an advantage of its use is that it encourages participants to give opinions without duress or feeling intimidated (Fraser, 1999:496). In comparison with individual or focus group interviews, the use of this technique improves decision making and forecasting (Skulmoski et al., 2007:1).

The Delphi technique is relatively simple and inexpensive to implement and has been used effectively for problem solving, forecasting and decision making in business and government since the 1950s (Green et al., 2007:18). The guidelines for the Delphi approach include the guaranteed confidentiality of all participants, controlled feedback of information, group

responses represented statistically, and input of a group of experts rather than "a random sample of the population" (Fraser, 1999:497). This method was selected as it was more practicable in reaching participants who were widely dispersed and with limited time at their disposal. It provided the respondents with the opportunity to participate in this research project regardless of the limitations of time and proximity, and yielded a large degree of convergence. This method allowed for the testing of knowledge by the experts as they refined their opinions over three rounds of surveys. Participants were kept informed of all the respondents' opinions, and statistical verifications of responses were sent to the Delphi panel after each round of surveys.

This project aimed to extend the Delphi method in two ways – to reconsider the traditional Delphi view of "expert" as the Delphi panel of experts included not only employers, but also recent graduates of the OM curriculum, and to expand on the requirements of the Delphi method regarding the issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The traditional Delphi method requires that the anonymity of the participants of the expert panel be guaranteed (Fraser, 1999:497). Some participants who had queries were able to meet with the researcher to clarify issues of concern. This was aimed at enhancing the process of achieving consensus.

A limitation of this method is that it may lead to conformity owing to group pressure (Rowe & Wright, 1999:372). For this research project, participants only made contact with the researcher who facilitated the process. Other shortcomings listed by Preble (1983:76) are that this process tends to be administratively complex and it requires a significant period of time to complete. The process was time-consuming and took three years to complete.

Delimitations of the Delphi surveys
The research was limited to participants residing in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, with the exception of one graduate who was resident in Namibia. Three types of experts constituted the Delphi panel: employers of OM graduates and third-year students undertaking the six-month internship component of the curriculum; graduates; and academics. The size and culture of the organisation at which graduates are employed determine the key performance areas allocated to them. For this reason the selection criteria were adhered to in order to ensure that while business experts and graduates were not all from large organisations, these participants operated in a medium to high technological environment that operated locally and internationally, and were involved in the major sectors of tourism, service and retail industries, as well as in production, education, medical fields, government and local government. The adherence to these selection criteria, which are discussed in detail

below, enabled participants to consider current office management work practices more objectively to determine the knowledge areas of the curriculum and the attributes required by office administrators.

Participant selection

Purposive sampling was used for the selection of the Delphi panel experts, comprising employers, OM graduates and academics in the OM Department. The limitation of purposive sampling is that it does not cover a wide cross-section of the participants. The advantage of this method is that in-depth information is obtained for a specific purpose from an interested group of participants (Maree, 2007:178). The academic staff member who supervises the placement of the third-year OM students for the OM practical component of the National Diploma provided the contact details of the more than 100 organisations that employ the OM students as interns as well as organisations that have OM graduates in their employ.

As advised by the academic who supervises the work placements, those organisations with track records of dedication to and support of the OM practical component of the curriculum and the placement of OM graduates, and who met the selection criteria discussed below, were chosen for the Delphi panel. These employers, OM graduates and academics were sent a consent form (Appendix H) requesting their willingness to participate in the research project, comprising three rounds of surveys distributed in 2010, 2011 and 2012. Those respondents who signed the consent form were sent the round one survey (Appendix J). Biographical details were used to ensure that all respondents met the selection criteria. The selection criteria of the Delphi panel are discussed below.

Business experts

This group of experts included 23 employers who met the selection criteria. The selection criteria included: 1) business experts in the Western Cape who were involved in the major sectors of the tourism, service and retail industries, production, higher education, medical fields, government and local government sectors; 2) business experts who operated in a medium to high technological environment locally and internationally; 3) business experts who had employed or currently employ OM graduates and/or third-year students (interns) and have direct involvement in their selection and mentorship; 4) business experts who use various South African first languages (e.g. isiXhosa, isiZulu, English and Afrikaans); and 5) business experts who willingly responded to the surveys and consented to participate in the process.

Graduates

This group of experts included 15 graduates who met the selection criteria. The selection criteria included: 1) those who had been employed for a minimum period of three years and who were currently in supervisory and/or office management practitioner positions; 2) graduates who were involved in the major sectors of tourism, service and retail industries, production, education, medical fields, government and local government; 3) graduates who spoke various South African first languages (e.g. isiXhosa, isiZulu, English and Afrikaans); and 4) those who provided consent and participated in the research project.

Academics

This group of experts included 15 academics who met the selection criteria. The selection criteria included: 1) academics who met the criteria of employment in the workplace within the past two to four years; 2) academics who met regularly with members of the business sector to remain informed; and 3) academics who consented to be part of the Delphi panel. All the academics had been employed within the previous two to four years in the business sector. Positions held by academics in the workplace, included positions as accountant, administrative assistant to a human resource manager, management consultant, training consultants, administrative officer, office manager, and operations manager.

Delphi surveys

Surveys and verification surveys were produced and conducted with the Delphi panel.

Round one and verification surveys

Round one surveys (Appendix J) were sent to employers, graduates and academics who met the selection criteria. Responses and signed consent forms were received from 23 employers, 15 graduates and 15 academics comprising the Delphi panel.

The questions developed for the survey aimed at investigating the employability of OM graduates. Panel members were asked to contribute to the development of the OM syllabus as well as provide input with regard to enhancing the employability or work readiness of OM graduates. The survey was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw their permission at a later stage if they so wished. The panel members were also assured of the confidentiality of the information provided by them.

The general and personal details of participants were covered under Sections A and B of the survey. Section C included a selection chart of the critical skills and personal attributes, and

the Delphi panel members were asked to rate the significance of the critical skills and personal attributes considered "necessary", "essential" or "critical" to foster the employability of graduates. Section D comprised a selection chart of subject-specific knowledge and skills summarised from the core curriculum of the current National Diploma in OM, as well as those that had been added to the core curriculum. An example is the inclusion of proposal writing in the Communication subject content. Delphi participants were asked to rate the significance of the knowledge and skills they considered necessary, essential or critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace, by ticking the relevant columns. They were also asked to include additional items that were not present in the current curriculum, and make any further comments or suggestions.

The round one survey was finalised and distributed to the Delphi panel. Based on an analysis of the initial data from the first round of surveys, a round one verification survey was produced (Appendix K). In Chapter 4 the data of the round one survey (Appendix P) is used to analyse the knowledge areas that underpin the current National Diploma in OM curriculum and the attributes necessary for office administrators.

The verification survey was constructed from the responses of the round one survey which were listed in the order of importance of the respondents' consensus ratings. The additional items that panel members included under each category of critical skills, personal attributes and subject-specific knowledge and skills omitted from the current curriculum of the round one survey were included for examination by the participants. The Delphi panel members were requested to examine the list that served to verify the responses made by panel members, and mark with an "X" and specify any items which they felt were incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list. They were also afforded the opportunity to make any other comments or suggestions. All the respondents concurred with the verification survey.

Round two surveys
A Delphi round two survey (Appendix L) was developed, based on the responses of the round one survey and verification survey. This was distributed to the Delphi panel. Based on an analysis of the initial data from round one of the surveys, the responses were listed in the order of importance as indicated by the respondents. Panel members were asked to rate the present and additional items in order of importance by marking with an "X" any items which they felt "necessary", "essential" or "critical" to foster the employability of graduates in the workplace. Panel members were offered the opportunity to make any other comments or suggestions regarding items they felt should be added to the list of topics.

Round two verification and round three surveys

The round two surveys were used to develop the round two verification and round three survey (Appendix M). The verification of the round two surveys served as the round three surveys and was re-sent to the Delphi panel. This comprised the consensus ratings of the round two surveys, including the additional topics that were added to the round one survey by the Delphi panel. The qualitative responses were analysed using Saldaña's (2008:5) coding approach comprising three stages, namely, the identification of verbatim key words, the clustering of keywords into thematic groups, and finally linking the themes to the theoretical framework. This provided the researcher with the initial steps towards a more intensive and revealing analysis and interpretation.

This data was fed into the recurriculation process as it provided evidence of the consensus of the Delphi panel on the relevance of the curriculum content, including topics that should be included in the new recurriculated curriculum. This data (Appendix Q) is used in Chapter 6 for the analysis of the new Diploma in OM developed in response to the process of recurriculation and Category B curriculum analysis and review, and to provide answers to the research questions.

3.3.3 Documentary data

Five types of documentary data were collected:

- Curricular documents, subject guides, teaching and learning materials, assessment materials, examples of students' projects and assessments, department goals and objectives, faculty and institutional documents, and the department's submission to the Higher Education Quality Council to revise the current National Diploma in OM. This is known as a "Category B" submission, which includes an analysis and review of the current curriculum as part of the work towards revising a current programme, in this case, the National Diploma in OM.

- Curricular documentation of core syllabi from four international institutions offering similar curricula to that of OM. These institutions were a university college in Belgium, a polytechnic in Portugal, a college in the USA, and an institute of technology in Ireland.

- Minutes of a DACUM workshop held on 9 November 2010, comprising nine representatives from the Western Cape business sector, a curriculum expert, and a teaching and learning coordinator for the Business Faculty.

- Minutes of a curriculum workshop held on 12 August 2011 comprising six OM graduates and five academics.

- Quantitative and qualitative results of a survey sent to third-year students and alumni of the OM Department. Responses were received from 113 students and alumni and the results used to inform this research.

3.3.3.1 Documentary and curricular data

The documentary data of the current OM curriculum, core subject outlines, and subject guides of the subjects comprising the curriculum, were examined. Documentation on the distribution of credits was examined, as well as examples of classwork, projects, assignments and assessments in order to understand the implied knowledge bases of the curriculum and to identify the knowledge areas drawn on in the development of the curriculum. The new curriculum of the Diploma OM submission for the "Category B" curriculum analysis and review documentation was studied to determine the knowledge areas drawn upon in its development. Institutional and faculty documentation, such as the strategic plans for the institution and the faculty, as well as institutional and faculty directives, were studied to establish who had made decisions with regard to the selection of knowledge areas for the OM curriculum.

Curricular documentation of core syllabi was obtained from four institutions offering programmes similar to that of the OM programme. For the purpose of the recurriculation process it was considered appropriate to benchmark the training of office managers at CPUT with international counterparts. The aim of this comparison was to determine whether there was any consistency in the knowledge bases of the CPUT current and new qualifications for office managers and those of four international institutions offering similar curricula. The curricular documentation was obtained from contacts at the institutions and from online sources. These were analysed and compared with the National Diploma: OM. Data obtained from these documents is used in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

3.3.3.2 A DACUM workshop: 9 November 2010

The minutes of a DACUM workshop held on 9 November 2010, and facilitated by a curriculum expert and the Faculty Teaching and Learning Coordinator (who is one of the managers of the Business Faculty with a focus on teaching and learning issues), were studied. The DACUM workshop was held in response to the Council on Higher Education Framework for Programme Accreditation (CHE, 2004:7) and to the Higher Education Quality Council requirements for renewal and change within its qualification structure. DACUM participants were asked to identify the general areas of competencies of office administrators and office managers. The input from employers was considered vital to the

analysis of the current curriculum and the development of the new recurriculated curriculum that is responsive to the needs of industry. The purpose of the workshop was to determine the positions graduates occupy in the workplace and the competencies and skills required by the graduates. The data was used in Chapters 4 and 6 for the analysis of the current and new curricula.

Delimitations and participant selection of the DACUM workshop
The DACUM workshop was limited to business experts residing in the Western Cape. Only those business experts who employed current diploma OM students for the six-month internship component of the OM Practical syllabus were invited. Nine employers attended the workshop. The participants included employers from a large government hospital, a national training organisation, a staff training organisation, a large national insurance organisation, a human resource management organisation, a building industry bargaining council, a large retail organisation, and two small, privately owned companies.

3.3.3.3 Curriculum workshop: 12 August 2011
On 12 August 2011 a curriculum workshop was facilitated by an OM academic, and attended by six OM graduates, the researcher and three other academics. The purpose of the workshop was to address the changing higher education context and its implications for the curriculum. The focus of the meeting was to draw on the knowledge and experience of the recent graduates to inform the restructuring of the OM curriculum. The researcher was given permission to attend the workshop and use the data for this study. Graduates were required to evaluate the current National Diploma curriculum and to provide suggestions for improvements to a revised curriculum. This data is used in Chapter 4 in the analysis of the current curriculum and in Chapter 6 for the discussion on the new Diploma: OM.

Delimitations and participant selection
The curriculum workshop was limited to graduates who had held administrative positions for two or more years. The six OM graduates were all employed and held senior administrative positions. The participants included graduates who held the following positions in the workplace: an administrative manager at a bank, a branch administrator at an international airport company, a senior licensing officer at a government department, a graduation coordinator at a higher education institution, a tax specialist, and a senior administrative officer.

3.3.3.4 Third-year student and alumni survey

In August 2011, OM academics distributed a survey to fulltime and part-time students who were in the process of completing their third year of studies, and to alumni of the current National Diploma: OM. Appendix N is an example of the survey sent to alumni students. The purpose of this survey was to evaluate the relevance of the current OM curriculum to the workplace. The survey required the students and alumni to identify the industry in which they had been employed during the OM Practical period of six months, or where they were still employed after graduation, and the position they currently held. Students were asked about the tasks that they were able to perform or could not perform in their current positions, and the workplace skills that were essential or not essential for their workplace positions. They were required to evaluate the knowledge and skills of the current curriculum and the usefulness of the subject areas that comprise the curriculum. The survey aimed to determine the skills, competencies and attributes that graduates require in order to perform their duties effectively in the workplace. They were also asked to make suggestions for the improvement of the current curriculum. This data was used for the analysis of the current curriculum in Chapter 4, and for the new curriculum in Chapter 6.

Delimitations and participant selection of the third-year student and alumni survey

The survey was limited to OM students who were in the process of completing the third year of studies and who had completed the six months of the OM Practical component of the curriculum, and to those who had already completed the National Diploma and were employed, as well as those studying part-time for their BTech degree. The respondents comprised 113 students of whom 34% had completed the six-month OM Practical component of the curriculum, and 43% the National Diploma. The remaining students did not indicate whether they were either still in the process of completing the third year of study or had completed their studies. Of these students, 44% were employed as administrative assistants, 4% as administrative supervisors, 3% as administrative managers, and 1% as store managers. Other positions were held by 14% of the students. These students were employed in manufacturing, wholesale, financial, hospitality, printing, public administration, education, marketing, and medical fields.

3.4 Interviews

The semi-structured interview is usually used to "corroborate data emerging from other data sources" and includes pre-set questions put to the participant in a methodical and consistent manner (Maree, 2007:87). It allows the researcher to acquire numerous answers to set questions and in-depth responses, and for the respondents to ask questions of clarification

where necessary. The interview schedule (Appendix O) included a section dealing with general questions requiring the interviewees to provide information on their home language, career and work experience. These were followed by the interview questions regarding the OM curriculum at CPUT and the OM curriculum at KaHo Sint-Lieven[3] University College in Belgium. The researcher was given the opportunity in May 2013 to visit KaHo Sint-Lieven University College in Belgium on a staff exchange programme for a period of two weeks.

To establish answers to the research questions outlined below, seven OM academics at campuses of CPUT were interviewed:

  1. Who decided on the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum?
  2. What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the curricula?
  4. What is the knowledge base of OM work?

Semi-structured interviews of approximately 20 to 30 minutes were held with the OM academics who provided information on the curriculum, subject guides, credit distribution, details of the course work, projects, and assessments over the six semesters of the current three-year curriculum. Throughout the five years of this research project, additional short interviews were conducted with the seven academics at CPUT on the current OM curriculum and the new Diploma in OM. This data is drawn on in determining the knowledge bases of the current (Chapter 4) and new OM curricula (Chapter 6).

KaHo Sint-Lieven University College in Belgium is situated in the Flanders province with Dutch as the official language. The Office Management (OM) curriculum is divided into the Management Assistant Languages (MA) curriculum and the Medical Management Assistant (MMA) curriculum. The researcher had the opportunity to interview six academics who lecture OM students. Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes were conducted with the six academics in Belgium. This data is discussed in Chapter 5 and used for the analysis of the new curriculum in Chapter 6. Table 3.2 shows an example of interview questions 1–11 of the schedule.

Delimitations and participant selection

The interviews were limited to seven academics who lecture in the OM Department at CPUT and six academics at KaHo Sint Lieven University College. All the academics have experience and knowledge of the OM curriculum. The OM academics, one of whom is the

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[3] KaHo Sint Lieven has changed its name to Odisee University College following a merger of two Flemish university colleges, College-University Brussel (HUB) and KaHo Sint-Lieven in September 2014.

head of department, lecture in the fields of Information Administration, Business Administration, Communication, Financial Accounting, Personnel Management, Legal Practice, and Mercantile Law. Interviews were conducted with the Head of Department for the OM curriculum at KaHo Sint Lieven University College, and with academics responsible for lecturing Communication, Information Administration, Human Resource Management, and English, and the academic responsible for the international and local internship placements.

Table 3.2: Example of the interview questions for academics

1. Please provide a brief course description of the Office Management curriculum at your institution.
2. What is the credit requirement for this curriculum?
3. What are the entry requirements for this curriculum?
4. How many students are registered for the curriculum?
5. What mode of assessment is utilised for this curriculum?
6. What input is used to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum?
7. What are the concerns of the stakeholders regarding the OM curriculum?
8. What syllabi comprise the course content of the curriculum?
9. What is the content of the syllabi which make up the curriculum?
10. What is the distribution of credits for the content of the syllabus that you teach?
11. Taking into account the assessment practices and knowledge practices of the individual syllabi, how would you categorise the underpinning knowledge of the subject content that you teach?

3.5 Data capture and analysis

In this section the capture and analysis of data is discussed. The data comprised an analysis of the pilot study, Delphi surveys, documentary data, and interviews. Primary data, both numeric and textual, were obtained using Delphi surveys as well as interviews with OM academics at CPUT and academics at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College. In this way both descriptive as well as evaluative information was acquired. The unit of analysis is the knowledge base of the OM curriculum.

Interviews and qualitative data were transcribed and coded drawing on methods for the coding of data developed by Saldaña (2008:8). This method involves the researcher's identification of keywords (participants' own words) and patterns, and the coding and categorising of these by clustering similar concepts. Saldaña's (2008:3) code analysis of words or short phrases symbolically assigns an essential attribute to a portion of data. As

Richards and Morse explain, it is not merely the process of labelling but it is the process of linking that "leads you from the data to the idea and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (Richards & Morse, 2007:137); thus the coding and analysis of data constitute a cyclical act. The coding of words and identification of patterns recur between the processes of collection of the data and data analysis (Saldaña, 2008:5).

3.5.1 Data capture and analysis of the Delphi surveys
This section comprises an analysis of the pilot study survey and the three rounds of Delphi and verification surveys.

3.5.1.1 Pilot study survey
Data was provided from ten Delphi panel members, namely, three academics, four employers and three graduates who responded to the pilot study survey (Appendix I). The data was analysed and captured in Excel spreadsheet format for the quantitative data. Table 3.3 provides an example of how the quantitative data was captured. Quantitative survey data was analysed using percentages and frequency tables. Qualitative data derived from the comments and explanations of the Delphi participants was captured using Saldaña's (2008:8) coding and categorising method. Table 3.5 shows an example of the coding and categorising method. As a result of the data received, the round one survey focused on the current National Diploma in OM curriculum.

3.5.1.2 Delphi surveys
As previously explained, the Delphi technique required a systematic development of opinions from experts in the field of OM to obtain reasonable consensus on the four research questions. The reliability of results was achieved through continuous verification throughout the Delphi process. Round one responses were used to develop the round two survey, and round two responses were used to develop the final verification and round three surveys. Additional content was included in the survey at each round to verify the results and to focus on the specifics of the research project. The results obtained from the surveys were extended by an analysis of the documentary and curricular data, and interviews.

Capture and analysis of round one survey data
The round one survey asked the Delphi panel to rate the significance of the critical skills, personal attributes, and knowledge and skills of the current curriculum for the purpose of enhancing the employability of OM graduates. Responses were received from all the

participants and were captured in Excel spreadsheets for the quantitative data. Table 3.3 shows an example of the capturing of the quantitative data.

A comparative analysis of the responses of the employers, graduates and academics to each question on the survey was also undertaken. Quantitative survey data was analysed using percentages and frequency tables to determine the results of the round one survey (Appendix P). Table 3.4 represents an example of a comparative analysis of the round one survey. The fourth column shows the average rate of consensus of the three expert groups' responses to those attributes they considered critical to the fostering of employability of the graduate, and the percentages of consensus for the individual expert groups' responses. Qualitative data, derived from the comments and explanations of employers, graduates and academics, was captured using Saldaña's (2008:8) recurring patterns and coding methods. Table 3.5 provides a similar example.

Table 3.3: Example of round one survey data capture and analysis

Academics	B5: No. of years engaged in field of Administration					B6: Position at current or last employment					
					11 or more years				Other		
15	N/A	1 - 3 yrs	4-6 yrs	7 - 10 yrs		Employer	Manager/ supervisor	Office Admin	Accounting	Training	Legal
A1			1							1	
A2		1							1		
A3		1						1			
A4		1						1			
A5		1							1		
A6					1		1				
A7					1	1					
A8					1			1			
A9			1								1
A10		1					1				
A11					1		1				
A12			1								1
A13					1			1			
A14					1		1				
A15				1			1				
Totals	0	5	3	1	6	1	5	4	2	1	2
%	0%	33%	20%	7%	40%	7%	33%	27%	13%	7%	13%

All participants were allocated a number and data attributed to an individual participant was identified by the code DS1 for the round one Delphi survey, followed by the code E for the employer, G for the graduate, and A for the academic and then the number. For example, DS1G11 is graduate number 11 who responded to the round one Delphi survey and DS1E12 represents employer number 12 who responded to the round one survey. Table 3.7 is the attribution table for the allocation of codes.

Table 3.4: Example of comparative analysis of round one survey

Critical Skills	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively	75%	73%	86%	78%
Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community	70%	73%	79%	74%
Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation	45%	73%	64%	61%
Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made	45%	73%	57%	58%
Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information	50%	33%	57%	47%
Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts	30%	27%	64%	40%
Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others	20%	40%	14%	25%
Explore education and career opportunities	20%	27%	21%	23%
Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation	20%	27%	21%	23%
Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively	15%	33%	7%	18%
Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities	15%	7%	14%	12%
Develop entrepreneurial opportunities	15%	13%	7%	12%

Round one verification survey

The verification of the round one survey has been described in section 3.3.2 under the heading, "Round one and verification surveys" which included the responses of the round one survey listed in the order of importance of the consensus ratings of the Delphi panel. The additional items which panel members included under each section of the round one survey were included for examination by the participants. The panel members concurred with the findings of the round one verification survey (Appendix K), which was used to develop the round two surveys (Appendix L).

Capture and analysis of round two surveys

The round two surveys were described in section 3.3.2 under the heading, "Round two surveys". Data received from 20 employers, 14 academics and 13 graduates was captured in the way described in the capture and analysis of the round one survey. Table 3.3 provides a similar example. The qualitative data was captured using Saldaña's (2008:10) method of recording comments and keywords, and then coding these two categories. Table 3.5 shows a similar example.

All participants were allocated a number and data attributed to an individual participant was identified by the code DS2 for the round two Delphi survey. This was followed by the code E (employer), G (graduate) or A (academic), followed by the number. For example, DS2A10 is academic number 10 who responded to the round two surveys. Table 3.4 presents a similar example of the comparative data analysis.

Capture and analysis of round two verification and round three surveys

The round two verifications served as the round three surveys (Appendix M). Panel members were provided with an analysis of the data from the second round of surveys and the responses were listed according to the highest to lowest ratings of consensus. Members were asked to examine the list which served to verify the responses made by panel members to the second round survey and indicate and comment if they did not concur with the consensus ratings. Responses were received from 19 employers, 14 academics and 12 graduates. All but three of the respondents concurred with the results of the final round survey. Three employers, two of whom were situated in local government, commented that knowledge of Legal Practice and Mercantile Law were not needed in their field of work and the third commented that the ratings for Financial Accounting should all be the same since all of the content is required for accountancy work. These comments allowed for the triangulation of data on the spreadsheets and provided the final round results of the survey (Appendix Q).

All participants were allocated a number and data attributed to an individual participant was identified by the code DS3 for the round two verification and round three Delphi survey. This was followed by the code E (employer), G (graduate) or A (academic), followed by the number.

Table 3.3 and 3.4 provide examples of the capture and comparative analysis of the quantitative data and Table 3.5 gives an example of the capture of the qualitative data.

3.5.2 Capture and analysis of documentary data

The minutes of the DACUM workshop and curriculum workshop were studied to provide answers to the research questions:

  1. Who decided on the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum?

  2. What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the OM curricula?

  4. What is the knowledge base of OM work?

These workshops focused on the subject-specific content of the OM curriculum and not on the critical skills and personal attributes required for the role of office administrator. The minutes did not describe responses of the employers and graduates attending these workshops, but provided summaries of the overall findings regarding the knowledge and competencies required by office administrators and office managers. The curriculum workshop also provided suggestions for improvement to the current curriculum. This data was analysed using Saldaña's (2008:5) code analysis of verbatim words and short phrases and then identifying recurring patterns. Table 3.5 is a similar example of the capturing of this data.

The quantitative data of the third-year student and alumni surveys was analysed on Excel spreadsheets using percentages and frequency tables. The comments of the 113 students and alumni who responded to the surveys were captured and allocated a number. Data attributed to the individual was identified by the code AS (alumni and student surveys) followed by the number of the alumnus/student. For example, AS23 represents alumnus/student number 23 who responded to the survey. Table 3.3 illustrates an example of how the quantitative data of the third-year student and alumni surveys was captured. This data was also used to address research question 3 on what attributes are implied by the OM curricula for the role of office administrator. This data is used in chapter 4 and chapter 6 for the discussion on the ideal office manager implied by the current curriculum.

The documentary data of the current OM curriculum was obtained by the examination of core subjects, curricular documents, teaching and learning materials, and assessment material. This allowed the identification of the distribution of credits to determine the answer to research question 2 on the knowledge areas drawn on in the development of the current curriculum. Institutional and faculty documentation was studied to determine decision making with reference to the topics or areas included in the current curriculum and to address research question 1 on who decided on the knowledge bases of the OM curricula. This provided the means for the assessment of the current National Diploma curriculum and the basis for the analysis of the documentation for the new Diploma: OM curriculum. This process allowed for

clarification and triangulation of data that supported the analysis obtained from the Delphi surveys, DACUM and curriculum workshops, third year students and alumni surveys and interview data.

Four institutions, consisting of a university college in Belgium, a polytechnic in Portugal, a college in the USA and an institute of technology in Ireland, provided the course content of the programme offered at their institutions that is similar to that of the OM curriculum. The course content of the four programmes was analysed to provide international data on research question 2 on what knowledge areas are drawn on in the development of the curricula. These documents were examined to provide data to determine whether the core curricula of these international institutions showed consistency with the OM curricula. Qualitative data derived from online discussions with academics at the Polytechnic in Portugal, college in the USA, and institute of technology in Ireland, was allocated a code and a number. Data attributed to an individual academic was identified by the code of the country of each of the institutions, followed by the number 1. For example, Portugal 1 refers to the academic from the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, who communicated online with the researcher.

3.5.3 Capture and analysis of interview data

To establish answers to research question 1 on who decided on the knowledge bases of the curricula, question 2 on what knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the curricula, and question 4 on what is the knowledge base of OM work, interviews were conducted with seven academics of CPUT. To establish answers to research question 2 and question 4 six academics at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College in Belgium were interviewed. The interviews were recorded and Saldaña's (2008:4) coding technique used to analyse the transcripts. Refer to Table 3.5 and 3.6 for similar examples.

All participants were allocated a number and data attributed to an individual academic at CPUT was identified by the code CPUT followed by a number. For example, CPUT 3 is academic number 3 who was interviewed. The academics at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College were allocated a number, and data attributed to an individual academic was identified by the code Belgium followed by the number. For example, Belgium 4 refers to the Belgian academic number 4 who was interviewed. Table 3.5 is an example of interview data capture and analysis.

Table 3.5: Example of interview data capture and analysis

B. Interview Questions	Head of Department	Initial code	Final Code
1. Please provide a brief course description of the Office Management curriculum at your institution.	The Bachelor of OM is a professional bachelor's degree with two major areas: Management Assistant and Medical Management Assistant. Graduates are involved in all aspects of the organisation. The graduates have excellent practical language skills that make them indispensable in the international workplace. There are many positions in the workplace as some management assistants are responsible for public relations, marketing and sales, and personnel selection. Those who choose the medical specialisation can easily work in hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and so on.	Professional degree Two major areas Language skills Many workplace opportunities	Professional versatile curriculum
2. What is the credit requirement for this curriculum?	The range consists of three years of 60 credits each. The course comprises 180 credits and follows a semester system.	180 credits and semester system	180 credits
3. What are the entry requirements for this curriculum?	There are no entry requirements for the OM curriculum at KaHo Sint-Lieven. Students may apply for higher education if they completed their studies at any of the three levels of secondary school qualifications. These qualifications include the General Certificate, which is similar to GCSEs of the United Kingdom; the Technical Secondary Certificate, which includes commerce and languages. Also the Vocational Education qualification where students qualify with a trade. The freedom of choice policy of the Belgian education system means that students can apply to go to any university or college. The student can apply for the OM curriculum and select the Management Assistant Languages or Medical Management Assistant course at KaHo Sint-Lieven. These students have usually acquired the Secondary General Certificate or the Secondary Technical Certificate.	No entry requirements Secondary school qualifications Freedom of choice	Accessible higher education

Over the period of this research project, additional interviews were conducted with the OM academics at CPUT. Table 3.6 represents an example of the coding of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the academics to determine the answer to interview question number 11 for the current Diploma in OM and the new Diploma in OM from 2010 to 2014.

Table 3.6: Example of the capturing of sequential interview data from the academics

Academic	Date	Date	Q 11.Taking into account the assessment practices and knowledge practices of the individual syllabi, how would you categorise the underpinning knowledge of the subject content that you teach?	Q 11.Taking into account the assessment practices and knowledge practices of the individual syllabi, how would you categorise the underpinning knowledge of the subject content that you teach?	Initial Code	Final Code
1	27/09/2010	04/09/2013	"Theory but problem-solving, case studies and application."	"Stakeholders require the application of knowledge."	Theory and application	Application required
2	22/09/2010	01/11/2013	"Mainly theoretical and hard to give practical work, but I try to bring in problem-solving exercises."	"It is mainly theoretical. There will be case studies and problem-solving exercises."	Theory and problem solving	Theory and application
3	16/02/2011	04/03/2014	"BA I and II have practical components, market day, work placement, seminars, say 60% theoretical and 40% practical."	"The new BA syllabi will have more practical application exercises, but still be say 60% theoretical and 40% practical."	More theory than practical	60% theory and 40% practical
4	3/03/2011	04/03/2014	"I would say a bit more theory than practical but this will be changing when the subject is divided into theoretical and practical components."	"The subject has been divided into theory and practical components."	More theory than practical	Theory and practical
5	9/05/2011	27/09/2013	"Theoretical but problem-solving case studies and exercises to apply knowledge."	"The new syllabus will have theoretical knowledge but also problem-solving case studies and exercises."	Theory and case studies	Theory and application
6	9/05/2011	25/04/2014	"Application of the theory as accountants must know how to solve accounting problems."	"The generic syllabus still requires application of the theory."	Theory and mainly application	Theory and practical
7	16/08/2011	28/10/2013	"Application of the theory as communicators must know how to use written and oral communication skills."	"The new syllabi must make time for application of the theory although the generic first-year syllabus will make this difficult to achieve."	Theory and mainly application	Theory and practical

3.6 Overall delimitations

This research project was limited to the employers in the Western Cape Province of South Africa who represent its business environment. Unlike the emphasis on the gold and manufacturing industries of the other provinces, the Western Cape focuses on the service industry (e.g., banking and tourism), fruit and wine production, the film industry, and national and local government sectors. While the businesses in the study are situated locally, they serve national and international markets. Businesses in the study were required to operate in a medium to high technological environment. Graduates who participated in the Delphi survey

were required to have relevant workplace experience and to be considered a successful office management practitioner. OM academics were required to have been employed in the workplace for between two and four years prior to their appointment at CPUT. The confidentiality of the participants on the expert panel was guaranteed and the researcher provided controlled feedback on information.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical practice requires that participants voluntarily agree to participate in the research and that they be informed that they are free to decline to be involved, at no detriment to themselves (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:521). Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the OM Head of Department and the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at CPUT. The confidentiality of the employers, graduates, academics and students was maintained throughout the research process. A letter of information and consent (Appendix H) was sent to all employers, graduates and academics, requesting their permission to participate. The assurance was given that their contributions were for the purpose of research and not for any other purpose. Confidentiality was ensured through a number of mechanisms. For example, pseudonyms could be provided when verbatim quotations were used for illustrative purposes in academic papers. Background information that would make identification possible was not included in any academic paper or public document.

All data accumulated from the Delphi surveys and documentary data and results was kept in a locked security cabinet to ensure the confidentiality of participants, institutions and organisations.

3.8 The position of the researcher in the research

As an academic lecturing in the OM Department at CPUT, I sometimes hold the position of researcher from the position of outsider, and at times I hold the position of academic. To prevent possible investigator subjectivity, the constant application of acknowledged methodologies, such as those described in sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5, assisted in limiting researcher bias.

The researcher's years of experience in both higher education and in the workplace facilitated a high level of trust in the interviews with the academic staff and in meetings with employers and graduates. The findings of this research will be made public through this thesis, as well as through conference presentations and journal publications.

3.9 Attribution table

The findings produced on the current Diploma in OM curriculum and the new Diploma in OM curriculum obtained from the Delphi surveys, documentary and interview data will be analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Attribution Table 3.7 provides the data sources and codes allocated for the reading of this data.

Table 3.7: Attribution table

CPUT	The university of technology where the research was conducted
Data sources	**Code**
Pilot study	**P**
Delphi round one survey	**DS1**
Delphi round two survey	**DS2**
Delphi round three survey	**DS3**
Employer	**E**
Graduate	**G**
Academic	**A**
Third year student and alumni survey	**AS**
Interviews at Cape Peninsula University of Technology	**CPUT 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7**
Interviews at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College	**Belgium 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6**
Polytechnic Institute of Porto	**Portugal 1**
Institute of Technology Carlow	**Ireland 1**
Morrisville State College USA	**USA 1**

3.10 Summary

The research design of a multi-method approach required data collection from a variety of sources and the use of a variety of research techniques. The use of LCT determined this approach and included the opinions and responses from employers, graduates, academics and students. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used, which included a pilot study, three rounds of Delphi surveys, documentary analysis of curricular documents of the current and new OM curricula from CPUT, and core syllabi from four international institutions, minutes of a DACUM and curriculum workshop and the results of a survey sent to third-year students and alumni. Interviews were also conducted with seven academics at CPUT and six academics of a Belgian college. Online discussions with academics at three other international institutions were also held.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from numerous sites, which included workplace sites throughout the Western Cape, one site in Namibia, and higher education national and international sites. Participants included experts in the field of OM, comprising employers, academics, and graduates, and data was also obtained from students. In order to answer the research questions, three rounds of a Delphi survey were designed and distributed

to a Delphi panel. For the purpose of clarification and triangulation, a documentary analysis of curricular data from CPUT and international institutions, workshops, and student surveys was undertaken, and interview data obtained. The quantitative data was captured and analysed using percentages and frequency tables, and the qualitative data was analysed for recurring patterns and themes with a view to understanding their relationships and alignment with the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2.

The researcher obtained permission from the OM Head of Department and the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at CPUT to conduct the research. All participants voluntarily participated in the research project, and signed letters of consent that informed them of the Delphi process and requested their participation in the project. Participants were free to withdraw from the project at any stage and the confidentiality of their responses was maintained. Participants were assured that their responses would be used for the purposes of research only. All data accumulated from the Delphi surveys and documentary data and results were kept in a locked security cabinet to ensure the confidentiality of participants, institutions and organisations. The consistent use of recognised research methodologies and a variety of research methods generating data from numerous sources helped to limit researcher bias.

In the next chapter, the subject offerings and credit allocation of the current National Diploma in OM curriculum is discussed and analysed in order to determine positional and relational autonomy, semantic gravity and semantic density, as well as the attributes of the ideal office manager, as implied by the curricular selections.

CHAPTER 4: THE CURRENT DIPLOMA IN OFFICE MANAGEMENT: REBRANDING SECRETARIAL WORK

> Twenty years ago, when a major study last took place in the UK, it was thought that new office technologies might transform the role, leading to a newly defined occupation equally appealing to both men and women ... We found evidence of continuity and change. Secretaries are now better qualified and generally well paid. A minority is undertaking complex managerial tasks. However, most secretaries continue to perform traditional tasks and career prospects for all remain bleak. We conclude that processes of role gender-typing are deeply entrenched and that secretarial work remains largely a ghetto occupation (Truss et al., 2013:349).

4.1 Introduction

There are many reasons why secretarial work has been described as a "ghetto occupation" with three key features: low status and poor pay, narrow and feminised job content, and poor promotion prospects (Truss et al., 2013:349). Dominant thinking about secretarial work as unskilled and routine strongly influenced the training of office administrators. The dominant discourses and stereotypical view of the secretary as merely replicating the words of others is a simplified notion of literacy and writers that has devalued the work of writing as the basis of secretarial and clerical work (Boyer & England, 2008:241). This does not accord with current views on literacy and communication, which emphasise the significance of these skills to the role of secretarial and administrative work (Solberg, 2014:3).

It is hoped that the analysis of the development of the current Diploma in OM that follows will offer insights into a neglected field of practice and its traditional knowledge bases. The focus on the knowledge bases of the current Diploma in OM and how these were decided merits attention, given the reach and scale of clerical work as a shaping influence on women's employment prospects, and the ways that conceptions of office work and the secretary as a feminine stereotype have served to classify, contain, or dismiss women's literate and intellectual labour. In the sections that follow, a brief description of the current National Diploma: OM is provided; this is followed by an analysis of its development and curricular structure, using the tools of LCT: Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation.

4.2 The current curriculum: underpinning the "invisible work" of office managers

Under apartheid, the South African higher education system comprised two basic types of higher education institutions: universities and "technikons" – with the latter providing diploma-level vocational education. In 1995, following the first democratic elections in South Africa, the Technikons Act of 1993 was repealed and technikons were permitted to offer degrees (Du Pré, 2009:vi) – which they did, often without clear criteria for the award of undergraduate or postgraduate degrees (Cloete, 2012). The current Diploma in OM reflects

these processes, in particular the drive towards degrees and concomitant strengthening or inclusion of academic subjects into the earlier secretarial programmes. The subject areas of the OM curriculum (Table 4.1) are the end product of developments arising from these changes in the South African higher education system.

Table 4.1: National Diploma: Office Management

Subjects/Levels	South African Qualifications Authority Credits	Appendix reference
YEAR 1 (NQF LEVEL 5)		
Information Administration 1	36	A
Business Administration 1	36	B
Communication 1	20	C
Personnel Management 1*	14	D
Financial Accounting 1*	14	E
Legal Practice 1	14	F
YEAR 2 (NQF LEVEL 6)		
Information Administration 2	36	A
Business Administration 2	36	B
Communication 2	20	C
Financial Accounting 1*	14	E
Legal Practice 2*	14	F
OM Practical Module A	14	G
YEAR 3 (NQF LEVEL 6)**		
Information Administration 3	40	A
Business Administration 3	40	B
Mercantile Law	20	F
OM Practical Module B	20	G
TOTAL CREDITS	360	

*Electives

** The OM diploma was approved when the National Qualifications Framework comprised eight levels, before the introduction of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework which has ten levels.

4.2.1 Subject offerings

The subjects foregrounded in the OM diploma are those associated with the new area of work and new technologies, namely, Information Administration 1, 2 and 3, and represent a departure from the artefacts and technologies of communication. In line with international trends, the focus is on the management of information flow and the relentless drive towards efficiency through systems development and mechanisation (Zachry, 2000:57), while the literacies and "writerly agency" (Solberg, 2014:4) strongly associated with secretarial work in the past, are reduced to 40 credits of Communication.

Credit values are a feature of qualifications frameworks in many countries. They are a rough guide to the amount of learning needed by students for their studies. In the South African system, a credit is that "value assigned by [SAQA] to ten (10) notional hours of learning" (Nkomo, 2000:23). Notional hours of learning are defined as:

> The learning time that is conceived it would take an average learner to meet the content defined, and includes concepts such as contact time, time spent in structured learning in the workplace and individual learning (Nkomo, 2000:23).

The South African Higher Education Qualifications Framework (DoE, 2007:6) stipulates the entire number of credits per qualification, including the minimum and maximum credits based on the notional hours per qualification. The level indicators (5–10) are connected to level descriptors which are wide-ranging, cross-field specifications that are expected of a qualification at a given level of the National Qualifications Framework/Higher Education Qualifications Framework (DoE, 2007:11). A three-year qualification of 360 credits is equivalent to 3 600 notional hours of study. For example, the course credit for the first year of Communication is 20 credits, which is equivalent to 200 notional hours of study. This includes all the learning activities in which the student is involved, such as contact teaching, feedback, consultations, tutorials, group learning, assignments, projects, and test preparation.

The credit allocations in the OM diploma show clearly the value ascribed to the subject areas, such as Information Administration and Business Administration, and the decline in the value of the language-based subjects. In the next section, the authority by which these curricular selections, sequences and weightings were awarded is analysed.

4.3 Positional and relational autonomy in the Office Management curriculum: the struggle for academic legitimacy

In this section, Maton's Autonomy codes (2005) are drawn on in building an understanding of the regulative institutional processes and discourses of the OM diploma curriculum. The analysis takes into account the development and history of the OM curriculum as well as the decision-making processes regarding the core curriculum, subject selections and credit distribution.

Maton (2005:697) defines positional and relational autonomy as follows:

Positional autonomy refers to the nature of relations between specific positions in the social dimension of a context or field and positions in other contexts. In terms of higher education, if agents occupying positions within the field (such as monitoring bodies or university governance) originate from or are primarily located in other fields (such as industry or politics), the field exhibits relatively weaker positional autonomy. In contrast, where these positions are occupied by agents located solely within higher education, the field exhibits stronger positional autonomy.

Relational autonomy refers to relations between the principles of relation (or ways of working, practices, aims, measures of achievement, etc.) within a context or field and those emanating from other contexts. In the case of higher education, if the ways of working or markers of achievement within higher education are drawn from other fields (such as economic gain), this indicates weaker relational autonomy. Where the field's principles of hierarchization look inwards to its specific activities (such as academic excellence), it exhibits stronger relational autonomy.

4.3.1 Positional autonomy: the struggle for university status

In section 1.2.1 the history of the OM programme is discussed. Significant to the analysis of the positional autonomy and the struggle for university status are the following developments. In 1992, the programme changed its nomenclature to the National Diploma in Business Administration. Business Administration, as a field of practice, usually implies the management of a business; as a field of study, it prepares candidates for management work in a range of different sectors: banking, finance, health care, insurance, real estate, retail business and technology (Hordern, 2014:389). This was not the case with the Diploma in Business Administration, which, despite the inclusion of subjects such as Business Administration 1, 2 and 3, Information Administration 1, 2 and 3, Communication 1 and 2, Mercantile Law 1, Legal Practice 1 and electives of Personnel Management 1 and Financial Accounting 1, remained one of office administration, rather than business administration. This was an extreme case of positional autonomy claiming a higher status, perhaps to legitimise the inclusion of the programme in a degree-awarding institution. In 1996 the name changed to the National Diploma: Commercial Administration, with the same subjects offered as in the "Business Administration" diploma. The change in nomenclature was slight, with "commercial administration" implying higher expectations than was evident in the subject descriptions. The curriculum was re-designed once more in the late 1990s and was called the National Diploma in OM, after consultation with all the technikons in South Africa.

Since 1999 a number of changes have occurred, such as degree programmes in OM, including a bachelor's degree, as well as master's and even doctoral degrees in OM. However, since the introduction of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (DoE, 2007), developments in higher education have seen the phasing out of the BTech degrees at universities of technology. At present the National Diploma: OM is situated in the School of Commerce in the Business Faculty at CPUT and includes studies in the fields of Information

Administration, Business Administration, Communication, Personnel Management, Financial Accounting, Legal Practice, Mercantile Law, and OM Practical.

The academic rationale, which was inherited from the Convenor Technikon dispensation, is that the current OM qualification is intended for secretaries (administrative assistants) at a senior level in all sectors of the economy. Graduates would be expected to

> provide independent and competent management support in the form of a secretarial service, as well as office and information administration, which requires a range of secretarial skills to enable them to plan and execute tasks creatively, professionally and efficiently in accordance with international standards in this field (CPUT, 2014a:8).

Graduates of the programme are expected to enter the workplace at the middle management level of an organisation, having human resource management, legal, financial, information technology (theoretical and practical), and communication knowledge and skills (Du Toit, 2008:2). The National Diploma: OM aims for students to develop the following:

- The ability to perform advanced information processing, with cognisance of the most recent changes and developments in office systems.
- The ability to effectively execute advanced managerial skills in the office environment.
- The ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing in professional environments (CPUT, 2014a:9).

A national benchmarking exercise was conducted in 2012 with Tshwane University of Technology, the University of South Africa, the Central University of Technology, Durban University of Technology and CPUT. The core content of the diploma was agreed upon and it was decided not to change the name of the diploma since employers and students regionally and nationally had accepted the name "Office Management" as a suitable representation of the curriculum (CPUT, 2014a:7). This was the only consensus, since "the curriculum content changes will be dictated by the institutional requirements" (CPUT 1, 2014).

As a result of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework that was promulgated in 2007 (DoE, 2007:5) for the purposes of coordinating a unified higher education system, different qualification routes were demarcated, namely formative, professional, and vocational. The changing higher education context has seen further developments in the promulgation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework in August 2013 (SAQA, 2013:6). These policies appear to have strengthened the autonomy of universities of technology, including their degree-awarding status. These developments have allowed the control of the OM

curriculum to remain in the hands of the universities, rather than of practitioners, thus maintaining stronger positional autonomy (PA+).

4.3.2 Relational autonomy: whose principles matter in Office Management?

Universities of technology have had a long history in providing career-oriented education and recognise the role of the workplace and practitioners in curricular decision making. The main way in which the world of the profession has influenced the curriculum is through "Advisory Committees". Such committees are required by most universities of technology; their membership comprises employers, graduates and academics. These committees exert a strong influence on the development of the curriculum – and this has generally been thought of as strength in technikon education (Rip, 2013:35). Curricula often change in response to input from the Advisory Committee meetings. This is in response to the recognised purpose of a diploma which is to build students' "knowledge and skills for skilled" and professional work, and further learning (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2011:36). As Du Toit (2008:1) claims, the subject matter of the National Diploma: OM "has always been multidisciplinary, which has accounted for its strength and adaptability in the changing workplace".

 The Advisory Committee acts as a "reality check" against the tendency towards "academic drift" or "inflation" of the course offerings (as in the case of the Business Administration Diploma described above). Office administrators, according to the South African Skills Development Strategy, should have competencies in "communication, time management, data capturing and report writing amongst others", while general secretaries are expected to be competent in "minute taking, bookkeeping, and filing management amongst others" (SA. Education, Training and Development Practices, 2010:62). Advisory Committee meetings provide a forum for the discussion of the progress of the students undertaking their OM Practical as well as general issues. Students returning from their OM Practical are given the opportunity to provide input to the committee on their experience of their academic studies and the OM practical. Academics also provide input on the course offerings based on their areas of expertise. Changes to the core subjects over the history of the OM diploma included more interdisciplinary approaches and the inclusion of new technologies, such as new software applications.

In a practical course, such as OM, it might be expected that the profession, represented by employers and workplace representatives, would dominate curricular decision making in OM, but this has not been the case. One of the reasons why the profession is weakly represented in

the curriculum has to do with the lack of official representative groups for secretaries or office managers: there is, for example, no "council", professional association or similar controlling board for office work. Star and Strauss (1999:20) have described the work of secretaries as "invisible" – and added to this are a number of complicating factors, including what Waymark (1997:109) calls the "ill-defined generic role, the short career path, and the female dominance of the profession". Thus the curricular principles informing the OM diploma have stronger relational autonomy (RA+). They are academic, rather than professional principles.

Reflections on Autonomy

The major conclusion drawn from the analysis above is that the positional autonomy of the universities has been maintained (PA+) and the curricular principles informing the OM diploma have strong relational autonomy (RA+). The current OM diploma gives evidence of the history of a struggle by academics and practitioners to make the work of office administrators visible and prestigious. Curriculum developers have attempted to underpin the taken-for-granted work, hidden under the general rubric of "support", with knowledge domains that are legitimate in a higher education context. The lack of clearly defined office management roles has posed difficulties for curriculum developers, and the tendency has been to claim legitimacy and status from the inclusion of academic subjects associated with more prestigious qualifications in the OM diploma. This process has undermined the essential knowledge base of secretarial work: writing and its technologies as shown in section 2.3 in the literature review.

4.4 Semantic gravity and semantic density: what knowledge matters in office management?

Barnett (2006:155) argues that vocational education and professional education always "face both ways" to the fields of practice and to the academic disciplines that underpin the practice. He contends that there are thus two recontextualisation processes for vocational curricula, which involve the recontextualisation of work practices into academic subjects as well as the recontextualisation of disciplinary knowledge into applied subject areas. This double recontextualisation comprises a series of knowledge translations, involving choices and struggles. Recontextualisation must show its legitimacy in both the academic and professional fields – and vocational curricula typically demonstrate these sometimes conflicting claims.

The Semantic codes developed in LCT are utilised to define the external and internal relations of the knowledge selection in the OM diploma. In the next section, the subjects of the OM curriculum are analysed to distinguish the stronger practical and contextual (stronger semantic

gravity) as well as the stronger theoretical and conceptual (stronger semantic density) course components for the purposes of a deeper understanding of the logic of the OM curriculum.

4.4.1 Semantic gravity: extreme horizontality

OM studies as a field could be described as a form of vertical discourse with a horizontal knowledge structure (Bernstein, 2000:157,160), derived from the applied language studies, applied linguistics, and technical and business communication. However, unlike the more strongly classified disciplines of information technology or law, office administrative studies have weak or "soft" boundaries that result in the field's absorbing most of its ideas and practices from other disciplines, including the wider world of management practice (Oswick et al., 2011:318). This results in a structure of extreme "horizontality", characterised by a series of "segmented" languages which appear to have limited common ground. In Bernstein's terms, the development of office administration studies as a field is an example of "regionalisation" (2000:52), where aspects of old areas of study (typing technology, shorthand notation) have been "recontextualised" into new combinations for the requirements of practice or for another "supervening purpose" which exists external to the existing disciplines (Muller, 2009:213). Bernstein, in his analysis of singulars and regions, discusses an additional "performance mode" which he identifies as "generic" produced "by a functional analysis of what is taken to be the underlying features necessary to the performance of a skill, task, practice or even area of work" (Bernstein, 2000:53).

Much of the current OM curriculum could be described as "generic" in this sense, a practical highly contextual programme that is stronger in semantic gravity (SG+). Refer to Table 4.3.

Information Administration

The content of the subject Information Administration is amended regularly in response to the recommendations from the Advisory Committee and from student interns returning from six months of OM Practical. This close association with practice and constant up-dating suggest the subject's deep contextuality, or "stronger semantic gravity" (Maton, 2013:11).

The Information Administration syllabi comprise 36 credits each for the first- and second-year syllabi and 40 credits for the third-year syllabus. It includes the study of the role of text and data processing, hardware and software, flow of information, computer applications, care and maintenance of equipment, the systems approach, information processing technology, the e-age, assessment of user requirements, systems and the modern organisation, the modern organisation in a global environment, computer security (which includes ethics and privacy),

and managing data and training software. The third year includes the study of management information technology and the management and systems development life cycle, the evaluation of hardware and software, in-house training vs consultancy services, and telecommunications, including networks, applications and software. With the exception of the application components, the rest of the syllabi content is what lecturers refer to as "theory" (CPUT 4, 2011), but while the above topics in the Information Administration syllabus might give an impression of stronger semantic density, upon closer inspection they turn out to be largely practical and context dependent. For example, one of the descriptors for topics in Software, is that "software is upgraded on a continuous basis to provide for technological changes" – suggesting heavily procedural content. Assessment tasks reveal a similar practical focus: the software applications are evaluated by means of "at least three office simulations, which contribute 40% towards the course mark" (Appendix A).

Information Administration uses continuous assessment, comprising formative and summative assignments, projects and tests. Table 4.2 is a segment of an assessment for third-year students, representing the integration of practical knowledge with the solving of a particular information technology problem.

Academics have tended to label the Information Administration component taught in classrooms as "theoretical", but this is a misunderstanding that has to do with pedagogy, rather than curriculum. Topics taught in the classroom are thought of as "theory", while topics addressed in the laboratory are thought of as "practical". The Delphi participants' responses to the round one surveys rated the Information Administration course highly in terms of enhancing the employability of the graduates. Competence in the use of email and the Internet received 72% consensus, comprising 70% employer, 92% graduate and 54% academic consensus. Of significance is the exceptionally high consensus rating of the graduates for email and internet skills. It is obviously perceived by the graduates to be significant to fostering their employability in the workplace. The MS Office suite obtained 72% consensus, including 70% employer, 77% graduate and 69% academic consensus. Word processing received 63% consensus, including 50% employer, 69% graduate and 69% academic consensus. The employer rating was not aligned with the ratings of the graduates and academics for the importance of word processing to the work readiness of the graduates. However, the employer and graduate ratings aligned more closely on the final round survey.

Table 4.2: Segment of an assessment for Information Administration 3 (2013)

INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION III: INTEGRATED APPLICATIONS PRACTICAL PROJECT 2013 MARK: 250	
OBJECTIVES:	1. The aim of this project is to provide real-world application and combine the knowledge gained in the 3rd year into one exercise. 2. You are encouraged to integrate the various applications *(MS Word, MS PowerPoint, MS Access, MS Excel and MS Project)* and apply your knowledge in a business of your choosing.
NOTE:	1. Look at the project as an open-book exam and gather as much information as you can to make it easier for yourself. 2. The help files (F1) and Internet are very useful and the latter should be checked before you ask for any assistance. 3. The project should consist of a well thought out corporate image that should be consistent throughout the project. 4. Your facilitator will notify you of due dates for submission of certain documentation. 5. Please adhere to the deadlines as this project carries a 10% weighting.
HINT:	1. Plan what items you need to successfully operate a business, talk to businessmen and women or do some research. 2. You are required to create/invent the information so choose something you know a little about *(e.g. if you are interested in cooking, then a coffee shop might be a good idea).* 3 The business should be small enough to be run by 3–5 people. 4. It is recommended that you leave MS Project for last as that is the last application to be covered. 5. This project carries a 10% weighting which forms a significant part of your practical evaluation; therefore a lot of time should be spent on it. It should also be consolidation of work learnt and preparation for the practical exams.
INSTRUCTIONS:	1. In groups of 3–5 decide on your business name, type, logo, organisational chart … and delegation of the tasks i.e. **divide the tasks fairly between each group member.** 2. You are required to submit a **disk** containing <u>all</u> documentation. 3. All the documents are to be hyperlinked to an index page in a folder on the disk. 4. You are to present your business to the class using MS PowerPoint 2007. 5. Pages 4–11 consist of marking rubrics. Study the pages before submission. 6. **Group feedback form (Action Plan).** Here you list which member was responsible for which task/s.
PROJECT SUBMISSION DATES (Subject to change)…	

The MS suite programs of spreadsheets: Excel IF statements received 60% consensus, protection of documents 59% and Windows management 57% consensus. The rest of the content of the Information Administration syllabi received less than 50% consensus from the Delphi panel (Appendix P). The third-year students and alumni (87%) considered the subject to be most useful as the curriculum provided knowledge and skills on "how to operate computers and working in MS Excel" (AS1) and "how to work in the MS Office packages" (AS12).

The practical components of Information Administration were valued by the Delphi panel members who felt that Information Administration "should be about being able to apply principles … or being able to identify the computer security threats that exist … having knowledge alone is not enough" (DS1G2), and should involve the practical "application of IT knowledge and skills" (DS1E1). A Delphi employer commented, "the expected standard of computer technology is fairly challenging and requires competency ... to be successful" (DS1E28). According to the DACUM members, an "administrative assistant should be able to use computer literacy [*sic*] effectively" (DACUM workshop, 2010:3). There were also calls for more advanced skills on database management, financial systems, and retrieval of information (Curriculum workshop, 2011:1), for "Pastel payroll" (DS1A10), "customer relationship management software" (CRM) (DS1G5), "MS Publisher" (DS1E6) and "SAP" (DS1E1). These comments emphasise the deeply contextual nature of the work, and its dependence on keeping up with changing office technology.

Changing work practices have increased demands for information technology skills within non-information technology professions and many employers want potential employees to have experience in desktop publishing, spreadsheets, and internet skills, in addition to the "traditional areas of file management, word processing and databases" (Lawson & De Matos, 2000:87). While the importance of information administration skills for the fostering of the employability of office administrators cannot be denied, academics are faced with the challenge of preparing graduates for the technological demands of the changing workplace and the diverse fields in which graduates find employment. Higher education needs to prepare students for the challenges of current business practices and for the workplaces of the future (Miller et al., 1996; Boud & Solomon, 2001; Geisler et al., 2001; Barnett, 2004).

Business Administration

A detailed study of the topics offered in the Business Administration syllabi shows that because the subject is called "Business Administration", this does not necessarily imply the inclusion of topics associated with business administration; it reflects the course aspirations, rather than its reality. See Appendix B for the core syllabi.

The syllabi comprise 36 credits each for the first- and second-year syllabi and 40 credits for the third-year syllabus. Core topics in the first year include: economic principles, business sectors, the administrative function, office procedure and duties, post and telecommunications services, financing, financial office procedures, and insurance. Additional content within these categories include entrepreneurial orientation and marketing. The second-year core

syllabus includes management functions, the office, office organisation, systems design and analysis, control of office activities, and administrative procedures. The third-year content comprises human resource management, office supervision, labour relations, financial management, and evaluation of administrative systems (Appendix B).

When rated by the Delphi panel for its centrality to office work, graduates revealed 85% consensus for the significance of knowledge of the office: organisation and supervision comprising 79% employer, 85% graduate and 92% academic consensus. Administrative procedures showed 82% consensus, including 68% employer, 85% graduate and 92% academic consensus. There is non-alignment of the employer consensus, which was lower than that of the graduate and academic respondents on the criticality of these aspects of business administration to the work readiness of graduates. Control of office activities revealed 66% consensus, management functions 57% consensus, and financial management 51% consensus. The rest of the Business Administration content received less than 50% consensus from the Delphi participants (Appendix P).

The third-year and alumni students' responses (77%) regarding the importance of the Business Administration subjects received responses of "most useful, one can implement all aspects in your actual workplace" (AS60) and "assisted me in knowing how the business environment works and to develop skills at work" (AS35). A Delphi participant commented that "the basic office management skills are necessary, in all contexts" (DS1E 23). However, requests were made for even more practical application of the office layout and equipment, for example, "how to set up a laptop, projector, etc." (Curriculum workshop, 2011:2) and "simulation teaching should be used – practical experience is needed" (Curriculum workshop, 2011:2). Critique of these syllabi includes concerns for the excessively high distribution of credits to topics that should be distributed more evenly throughout the curriculum. The selection of content for the third year was considered inappropriate because of its focus on human resource management and labour relations, as both topics are repeated in other subject areas.

Personnel Management
Graduates need to know about dealing with individuals and group dynamics when they enter the workplace. The core syllabus comprises 14 credits and is offered over a one-year period at the first-year level. Originally the syllabus was offered as an elective option for the Financial Accounting syllabus. However, in recent years it has been incorporated as a permanent component of the curriculum. It includes the study of business psychology and human

behaviour, dealing with individuals, personal relationships at work, dealing with small groups, and an introduction to human resource management. The theoretical and conceptual components that include business psychology and human behaviour are fairly minimal and the subject name is misleading. The course is largely practical and contextual, dealing with individuals, small groups and personal relationships in the work environment and there is probably an inappropriate credit allocation for this subject in the OM diploma (Appendix D).

The Delphi participants' assessment of the subject is as follows: resolving frustration and conflict attained 78% consensus, comprising 64% employer, 79% graduate and 92% academic consensus. Stress management received 72% consensus, including 64% employer, 86% graduate and 67% academic consensus. The significance of attitudes and behaviour in the workplace showed 70% consensus, comprising 64% employer, 64% graduate and 83% academic consensus. Dealing with individuals received 65% consensus, with 77% employer, 50% graduate, and 67% academic consensus. The rest of the content received less than 50% consensus as critical to fostering the work readiness of the graduate (Appendix P). While there is not much alignment of the consensus ratings of each group for these aspects of the syllabus, the highest consensus rating of the employers was for the importance of dealing with individuals. An employer commented, "OM graduates have to be aware of how to deal with other people and clients" (DS1E17). Of the third-year students and alumni, 62% considered personnel management to be most useful to their future in the workplace.

The graduates at the curriculum workshop listed the knowledge and skills acquired from the study of Personnel Management as the "behaviour aspects of the workplace, how to deal with stress, business psychology and team building" (Curriculum workshop, 2011:5). While students have case studies, research and problem-solving exercises, the curriculum needs to include simulation of workplace scenarios and implementation such as interviewing candidates for positions, drafting of job descriptions, and undertaking performance appraisals. An employer commented, "in addition to subject knowledge and technical skills, it is necessary to be adaptable [and] to be able to apply knowledge" (DS1E6).

OM Practical

A component of the syllabus, Module A, comprising 14 credits, constitutes two periods of lectures during the final semester of the second year of study (Appendix G). Second-year students meet with the Cooperative Education academic to compile a portfolio of evidence and to develop a personal profile, a goal plan and a skills inventory, and to construct a covering letter and CV. Students are sent to interviews with employers to secure a work

placement for the internship period in the third year of their studies. The Module B component comprises 20 credits and consists of six months of internship for the third-year students (Appendix G). Students are required to apply what they had learned during the first and second years of study, to solve problems, apply critical thinking skills and be able to communicate effectively in the workplace with clients and their colleagues. Students receive mentorship in the workplace and at the end of the six months they are assessed by the employer, and have to produce a portfolio of evidence of their experiences in the workplace.

An employer commented "this is an important component of the curriculum … students need to focus on a positive and assertive presentation of themselves in the workplace" (DS1E23) and an alumnus called for "an increase in the period of experiential training" (AS32). Archer and Davison (2008:5) contend that work placement is critical to enhancing graduate employability skills, and Billet (2002:457) argues:

> These practices comprise the reciprocal process of how workplaces afford participation and how individuals elect to engage with the work practice, termed co-participation … Learning is conceptualised as … [a] process of participation in social practices such as workplaces. It is not reserved for activities and interactions intentionally organised for learning (e.g. those in educational institutions).

Research undertaken on graduates' perceptions of the extent to which their particular higher education qualification contributed to employability at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) showed that of the 2 379 of graduates who completed the survey, 91% felt that work-based or experiential learning contributed to their employability (Nel & Neale-Shutte, 2013:446).

4.4.2 Semantic density in the Office Management Diploma: the keeper of secrets

Secretaries are entrusted with the company's secrets (Biebuyck, 2006:10) and they brief employees and disseminate documents (Waymark, 1997:108). They are required to communicate with clients, customers and staff to achieve the goals of the companies by whom they are employed. Since the commencement of secretarial training there has been a strong focus on language, communication and writing. An emphasis on these curricular components would strengthen the semantic density of the OM curriculum. Shay and Steyn (2015:4 forthcoming) contend that progression in professional curricula includes progression to the contexts of practice and application (stronger semantic gravity) from disciplinary areas (stronger semantic density). Stronger semantic density as the core of the OM curriculum is likely to enable progression and cumulative knowledge building. The current OM curriculum is stronger in semantic gravity and weaker in semantic density (SG+SD-).

Communication

Language and communication underpin the work of the office manager, but are not recognised as such in the OM diploma. Communication is offered over two years, with 20 credits each for the first and second year (Appendix C). The first-year syllabus comprises a study of the communication process, barriers to effective communication, perception, intercultural communication, self-concept, non-verbal communication, listening skills, conflict resolution, written communication, meetings and public speaking. Additional items include telephone techniques, and within the core category of written communication, a variety of business letters, letters of application, emails, memoranda and facsimiles. The second-year syllabus includes the study of group communication, conflict resolution, negotiation and customer relations, advanced public speaking, advanced writing practice, research skills, and interviewing skills. Advanced writing practice includes items such as report writing, meeting correspondence and the writing of proposals. Items such as professional self-development and skills assessment have also been included. The subject assesses the "knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation" of communication practices (Hollis-Turner, 2008:8).

The OM assignments in many of the other subjects are underpinned by the theoretical and conceptual knowledge gained in communication classes: workplace simulations within the classroom, practical applications of assignments in the computer laboratories, oral presentations in the classroom, and assignments on the application of interviewing skills. Oral presentations are required of students during first and second year, telephone technique during the first year, formulation of surveys, forms, emails and facsimiles, business letters, CV writing and interviewing skills during both the first and second year, and meeting procedures during the first and second year of study. These sections of the communication syllabi include simulated work conditions and students are required to apply what they have learned to case studies and scenarios that may arise in the workplace. Students work individually and in groups on problem-solving exercises, presentations, research projects and case studies.

While each subject of the National Diploma: OM programme has its own course content and assessments, an integrated assignment, such as the event management and seminar assignment, attempts to integrate Communication and business writing, Information Administration and Business Administration (Hollis-Turner, 2008:8). Students prepare letters of invitation to guest speakers, plan the budget, arrange funding projects, organise the venue

and meals for the day, host the guest speakers, OM academics and students, and prepare a report on the entire event.

The Delphi panel assessment of the Communication syllabi achieved the following rating: oral communication and presentation skills received 74% consensus, comprising 70% employer, 79% graduate, and 73% academic consensus. Listening skills and conflict resolution received 71% consensus, including 70% employer, 64% graduate and 80% academic consensus. Teamwork and small groups only received 63% consensus, unlike its 74% consensus rating under the analysis of the critical skills significant to promoting the employability of graduates. In the final round analysis, the non-alignment of the consensus rating is less. Telephone technique received 58% consensus and intercultural and organisational communication received 50% consensus of the Delphi panel. The rest of the content of the communication syllabi received less than 50% consensus of the Delphi participants (Appendix P). According to the Delphi panel members, "technical knowledge and skills … stand for little and are useless unless this can be communicated effectively and applied" (DS1E16) and "communication skills are the most important skills required" (DS1G14). Of the third-year students and alumni, 83% rated communication studies as most useful to their futures as office administrators and managers.

The SA Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2013b:205) report draws attention to the findings of the Higher Education South Africa report (HESA) (Griesel & Parker, 2009) that two of the largest gaps between employer expectations and the levels of skill they found in graduates were with regard to written and oral presentation skills. This needs to be the focus of the Communication syllabi for the development of the professional identity of office administrators and for enhancing the employability of OM graduates. With the increasing numbers of students in classes, added pressure is put on the academics to make time for opportunities for the practising of these skills. These syllabi need additional time allocated to the development of expert practice. The Curriculum workshop graduates suggested more emphasis on Business English and business writing practice, and that communication should be offered as a third-year subject (Curriculum workshop, 2011:3). The Delphi participants suggested emphasis be given to "communication, meeting procedure and emails" (DS1G15) and for the allocation of more practical time to "presentations and communication skills" (DS1E24).

Financial Accounting

The Financial Accounting syllabus (Appendix E) comprises 14 credits at first-year level and was offered as an elective option for the Legal Practice 2 syllabus. It includes an introduction to accounting, subsidiary journals, ledger and trial balance, fixed assets, stock, debtors, creditors, bank reconciliation statements, results of operations and financial position, analysis and interpretation of financial statements, clubs and non-trading undertakings (introductory), budgets and budgetary control.

The Financial Accounting syllabus was considered useful as graduates reported that it assisted with the management of personal and business financial activities (Curriculum workshop, 2011:4). The graduates at the curriculum workshop identified the skills acquired by studying Financial Accounting as financial management, income statements, budget management, trial balance, accounting systems and procedures, financial ratios, budgeting, and how to read financial statements. The syllabus was also considered "least useful" (AS39) and it is "not required in my field of work as we do have specialists" (AS70).

The Delphi panel rated the Financial Accounting content as follows: budgets and budgetary control showed 78% consensus, with 64% employer, 83% graduate and 88% academic consensus. The introduction to accounting received 67% consensus, comprising 50% employer, 75% graduate and 75% academic consensus. Analysis and interpretation of financial statements showed 58% consensus, with 36% employer, 75% graduate and 63% academic consensus. The rest of the content received less than 49% consensus as critical to fostering the work readiness of the graduate (Appendix P).

Significantly the employer ratings were consistently lower than those of the graduates and academics. Members reported that "financial accounting skills are not critical for administrative work in a training environment – this function is outsourced" (DS1G14) and "apart from budget control and planning for the year ahead, the financial management aspect is often based elsewhere as a support service" (DS1E11). Only 55% of the third-year students and alumni rated financial accounting as useful to their future in the workplace.

Legal Practice and Mercantile Law

The inclusion of these subjects suggests that executive secretaries need some knowledge of legal practices, particularly as a legal secretarial specialisation was offered in the past diplomas. However, questions have arisen regarding the significance of the Mercantile Law

syllabus for OM. Over the years, the syllabi were revised to align with changes in law and in harmonisation with other law courses offered by the institution.

The Legal Practice syllabus comprises 14 credits and includes an introduction to the law, the administration of justice, civil litigation, debt collections, close corporations and a brief introduction to wills, codicils and conveyancing (Appendix F). The Legal Practice 2 syllabus comprising 14 credits was offered as an elective and includes the study of conveyancing and wills, and the administration of estates. This syllabus has been discontinued and is no longer offered at some of the universities of technology. The core syllabus for Mercantile Law comprises 20 credits and includes the study of general principles, specific contracts, labour law, and immaterial property law (Appendix F).

The Legal Practice syllabi were assessed as "useful; assisted my understanding of the different types of contracts one can get and can enter into (AS12), but another student commented, "I do not make use of these [subjects] in my current work" (AS26). Only 50% of the third-year and alumni students rated the Legal Practice syllabus and 47% the Mercantile Law syllabus as useful, and one student commented that it is "not used in my current work situation" (AS4). However, another student was of the opinion that the subject was "helpful with knowing [*sic*] the law and what is acceptable in the workplace" (AS36). While the consensus rating for the current syllabi of Legal Practice and Mercantile Law received less than 50% consensus by the Delphi panel as critical to fostering the work readiness of graduates, 75% of the employers of the Delphi panel rated labour law as critical to the fostering of employability of the graduate (Appendix P). The graduates attending the curriculum workshop (2011:6) suggested that "it is too much theory and not enough practical exercises or understanding of the law".

4.4.3 Reflections on the semantic wave in the National Diploma: Office Management curriculum

In LCT all practices are characterised by both semantic gravity and semantic density; what differs are their strengths. The semantic wave (Maton, 2013:12) is described as representing "a semantic scale of strengths of semantic gravity and semantic density". The semantic scale is the y-axis of a profile and the semantic wave represents activities that build cumulative knowledge over a period of time. The semantic wave maps the movement of theory-based and conceptual components and practice-based and contextual components of the syllabi.

The decontextualisation of practical knowledge from the workplace and recontextualisation into curricula context results in a weakening of semantic gravity and there is a strengthening of semantic density as "condensation of concepts as practices are translated into principles" (Shay, 2013:573). This simulated practice, and principles and concepts, are derived from practice, not theory, and while its dependency on its immediate contexts is reduced, it is still bound by the context of the practice from which it originates. The curriculum logic is practice that puts "a ceiling" on semantic density and does not devalue this kind of curriculum needed in vocational and professional education (Shay, 2013:573).

The course documentation, assessments and data from interviews with the academics were analysed to highlight the theoretical and conceptual knowledge (stronger semantic density) and the application and contextual (stronger semantic gravity) components of the curriculum to determine the credit distribution over the period of three years (Table 4.3). These components were mapped out over six semesters (Figure 4.1) to produce a semantic wave.

Table 4.3: Credit distribution – National Diploma: Office Management

Subjects/Levels	South African Qualifications Authority Credits	Semantic gravity ± percentages ***		Semantic density ± percentages ***	
YEAR 1 (NQF LEVEL 5)			%		%
Information Administration 1	36	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
Business Administration 1	36	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
Communication 1	20	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Personnel Management 1*	14	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
Financial Accounting 1*	14	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Legal Practice 1	14	SG-SD+	30	SG-SD+	70
YEAR 2 (NQF LEVEL 6)					
Information Administration 2	36	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
Business Administration 2	36	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
Communication 2	20	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Financial Accounting 1*	14	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Legal Practice 2*	14	SG-SD+	30	SG-SD+	70
OM Practical Module A	14	SG+SD-	80	SG+SD-	20
YEAR 3 (NQF LEVEL 6)**					
Information Administration 3	40	SG+SD-	75	SG+SD-	25
Business Administration 3	40	SG+SD-	65	SG+SD-	35
Mercantile Law	20	SG-SD+	40	SG-SD+	60
OM Practical Module B	20	SG+SD-	100	SG+SD-	0
TOTAL CREDITS	360				

*Electives

** The OM diploma was approved when the National Qualifications Framework comprised eight levels, before the introduction of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, which has ten levels.

*** These values are approximate percentages which were estimated through a study of syllabi documents and the mark allocation of assessment tasks, as well as interviews with relevant academics.

The National Diploma: OM is a programme comprising stronger semantic gravity components supported by a weaker component of semantic density (SG+SD-). The dark line in Figure 4.1 refers to the stronger theoretical and conceptual elements (stronger semantic density) and the grey line to the stronger application and contextual elements (stronger semantic gravity) of the syllabi. The semantic wave shows the distribution of credits to the practical and contextual and theoretical and conceptual components of the curriculum over six semesters. In the fourth semester, students receive the Module A component of the OM Practical syllabus in preparation for the internship period which comprises application and contextual components, thereby raising the semantic gravity. In semester five, the third-year students only have six months of classes comprising Information Administration, Business Administration, and Mercantile Law. Both Information Administration and Business Administration have stronger application and contextual components, consequently raising the semantic gravity. While it may be expected that semantic gravity would increase as students enter the workplace in the sixth semester, the credit value allocated to this component is only 20 credits and therefore there is a drop in semantic gravity. The allocation of 20 credits for this application component of the OM Practical syllabus is an inappropriate distribution of credits to this component of the curriculum.
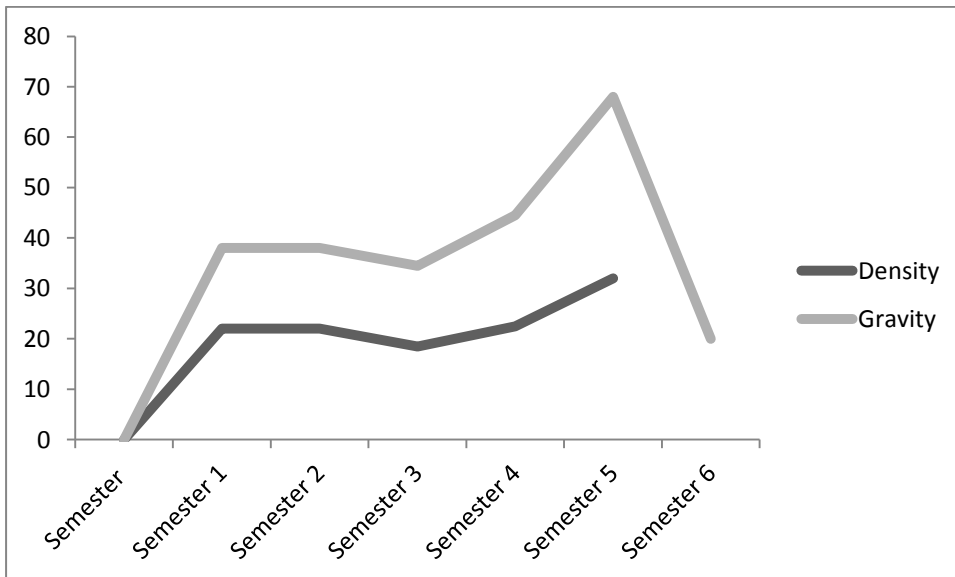
Figure 4.1: Semantic wave of credit distribution over six semesters

Table 4.3 and the semantic wave described above exhibit the relative strengths of semantic gravity and semantic density. Figure 4.1 shows the strong relationship between semantic gravity and semantic density. As the semantic gravity rises, with the exception of the internship period in the sixth semester, there is a commensurate rise in semantic density to

create the underpinning knowledge. From a study of the syllabi documents, the mark allocation of assessment tasks and interviews with academics, approximate percentages were estimated of the components of knowledge which were stronger practice-based and contextual and those which were stronger theory-based and conceptual. This is important for profiling the Diploma in order to determine those components of the syllabi which comprise stronger semantic gravity and those which comprise stronger semantic density.

The next section comprises a discussion of the analysis of the OM curriculum drawing on the Specialisation code to determine the ideal graduate for the field of practice of office administration.

4.5 The ideal office manager: knowledge and knowers implied by the Office Management curriculum

The Specialisation dimension may be described as "what makes someone or something different, special and worthy of distinction" (Howard & Maton, 2011:196). This dimension emphasises that "every practice, belief or knowledge claim is about or oriented towards something and by someone" (Howard & Maton, 2011:196). The "epistemic relations (ER) between practices and their object or focus; and social relations (SR) between practices and their subject, author or actor" (Howard & Maton, 2011:196) may be more strongly or weakly emphasised in practices and beliefs. The code describes the "dominant basis of success of a social context" (Howard & Maton, 2011:197) and the aim is to determine the ideal graduate.

General understanding of the secretarial role by the public appears to revolve around typewriting, answering the telephone and being supportive (Waymark 1997:108). There are, however, wide differences with regard to the roles and attributes expected of office managers in the research literature: from Kanter's (1977:89) derogatory "office wife" to Holten-Møller and Vikkelsø's (2012:33) study of the clinical role played by medical secretaries. Tact and discretion are usually valued, particularly when the work is highly confidential, but in common with other useful attributes, such as reliability and helping others, these attributes are not exclusive to office management. This is what Waymark (1997:112) calls the "inherent problem" in developing a curriculum for secretaries. Office managers are employed by another to be an organiser and facilitator – and the nature of their knowledge and attributes is subject to considerable variation; it is dependent on the nature of the work that they support.

The Delphi panel members were asked to rate the key attributes or critical skills of office managers. The ability to organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively received 78% consensus, comprising 75% employer, 73% graduate and 86% academic consensus. The critical skill to work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community showed 74% consensus, consisting of 70% employer, 73% graduate, and 79% academic consensus. There appears to be alignment of the Delphi respondents with regard to the criticality of these skills in enhancing the employability of the graduates. An employer commented that "graduates need to communicate and build relationships, i.e., networking" (DS1E23). To work as a member of a team was considered essential by 71% of the third-year students and alumni for their current workplace positions, and research undertaken regarding employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates identified team work as particularly relevant (Lowden et al., 2011:12).

Communicating effectively, using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation received 61% consensus; while identifying and solving problems through responsible decision making using critical and creative thinking, showed 58% consensus of the Delphi participants. A graduate commented that "it is important to be able to communicate with top-level executives" (DS1E4) and 72% of the third-year students and alumni considered communicating with colleagues at all levels to be essential to their positions in the workplace. However, in these categories the employers of the Delphi panel had a significantly lower rate of consensus than the graduates and academics. In the third round survey the consensus ratings of the Delphi panel are more aligned with regard to these critical skills. The rest of the critical skills received less than 50% consensus of the Delphi respondents (Appendix P).

The Delphi panel members rated personal attributes adapted from the Employability Skills Framework personal attributes (Bowman, 2010:16) critical to fostering the employability of graduates. The highest overall consensus rating of 83% was for the generic attribute of being reliable, comprising 91% employer, 79% graduate and 80% academic consensus. Having honesty and integrity received 81% consensus, including 91% employer, 71% graduate and 80% academic consensus. The personal attributes of being loyal and committed showed 74% consensus, with 86% employer, 64% graduate and 73% academic consensus. This shows the employers' high regard for these personal attributes as critical to enhancing the work readiness of OM graduates. Research undertaken by the University of Glasgow on employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates revealed that in addition to a

combination of transferable skills identified by employers, the need for particular attitudes such as motivation, commitment and tenacity was also highlighted as valuable for graduates entering the workplace (Lowden et al., 2011:12).

The personal attributes of dealing with pressure received 69% consensus and being adaptable showed 64% consensus. Being motivated, having enthusiasm and possessing common sense received consensus in the 50 to 60% range. The rest of the personal attributes received a consensus rating of below 50% for their criticality to promoting the employability of graduates (Appendix P). Graduates commented that "using your own intuition" (DS1G3) and "having self-confidence" are important in the workplace. The ability to work independently and deal with workplace pressure was rated by 66% of the third-year students and alumni as essential requirements for positions in the workplace.

A global perspective report commissioned by the International British Education and Examination Board (Edexcel), which focused on effective education for employment, undertook a study in Brazil, China, the United Arab Emirates and South Africa (Playfoot & Hall, 2009), which identified the qualities valued by employers. In South Africa the need for greater emphasis was on soft skills such as "communication, leadership, critical thinking and confidence" (Playfoot & Hall, 2009:50). Archer and Davison (2008:7) investigated employers' opinions of the employability skills of new graduates, at small, medium and large organisations with both UK and international divisions. They found that irrespective of the size of the organisation, soft skills such as communication and team-working skills were considered to be the more important skills required by employers than hard skills, such as information technology skills or a good degree qualification.

4.5.2 What knowledge does the office manager need?

The National Diploma: OM is clearly a knower code, where the epistemic relations are weaker (ER-) and the social relations are stronger (SR+). The work of the office administrator and office manager is about supporting the work of others and thus comprises stronger social relations (SR+). Maton (2014:72) argues that "for every knowledge structure there is also a knower structure" and to focus solely on knower structures is to recognise "only one dimension of fields". While each of the syllabi of the National Diploma includes components of the knowledge code, those subjects that would usually be regarded at "knowledge codes" (e.g., Accountancy and Information Administration) are not taken to a sufficiently high level in the diploma to mark these areas as the epistemic base of the qualification. Similarly, Legal

Practice and Mercantile Law comprise knowledge areas, but are misaligned with the field of practice of office administration.

4.6 Conclusion

While disciplinary knowledge is increasingly seen to be important in professional education, the introduction of disciplinary knowledge that is misaligned with the field of practice is not helpful. Studies that emphasise the importance of the theoretical knowledge that underpins all but the most routine work, often fail to point out the importance of appropriate and meaningful curricular selection. In the same way that the inclusion of geo-history in soil formation in a Construction Management Diploma (Allais, 2011:116) was clearly not "powerful knowledge" for this profession, so the inclusion of Mercantile Law is inappropriate for office management, and therefore not "powerful knowledge" for the profession. This is a misinformed attempt to include what might seem to be more prestigious disciplinary fields in a programme as a way of claiming status.

Misalignment is a particular concern in professions that do not yet have a clear and stable disciplinary base for their practice. Wheelahan (2010:4) argues that it is important to provide students with opportunities to acquire systematic disciplinary knowledge to enable them to develop the kind of thinking that emerges from such engagement. It seems that an appropriate disciplinary base for the profession might be language, communication and writing. The growing importance of communication as basic to secretarial and office administration knowledge is gaining recognition (e.g., Zachry, 2000; Tench, 2003; Boyer & England, 2008).

By shifting the linguistic knowledge base to a lower status and emphasising the technical and practical highly contextual components of office work, the OM diploma has attempted to teach procedures without explicitly teaching the knowledge codes. This has made administrative work relatively mechanistic, while the holistic (and skilful) role of the business communicator has been undermined. One of the research participants has attempted to articulate this:

> There is a basic "platform" of knowledge and skills which OM graduates must pass to enhance their "employability" … when considering the employability of a graduate this has to be seen in the following context: 1) technical knowledge and skills which are "subject specific", e.g., in respect of finance, IT etc., 2) communication skills "cross-cutting" and the technical knowledge and skills referred to above which stand for little unless these can be "communicated" effectively and applied, 3) application of knowledge and skills, 4) personal aspects, e.g., attitude, sense of humour, management of stress, loyalty etc., i.e., these aspects which require awareness and then need the student to embrace beyond formal teaching (DS1E16).

In the next chapter, the findings of an analysis of four international institutions, with similar curricula to the National Diploma, are discussed. The dimension of the Semantics of LCT was drawn on to analyse the core curricula of these international institutions to establish if they showed consensus with the knowledge areas of the OM curriculum. The areas of consensus and non-consensus are described and explained.

CHAPTER 5: INTERNATIONAL CURRICULA

> The strengths of universities of technology curricula lie in their "expertise and linkages with the outside world" (Engel-Hills et al., 2013:8).

5.1 Introduction

South African higher education is often thought of as a "special case" because of our unique history and challenges (Higher Education South Africa, 2014:1). In many cases, however, the challenges faced by higher education in South Africa match global trends and experiences. It might then be expected that the particular challenges and experiences of training office managers at South Africa universities of technology might resonate with those of similar higher education institutions globally. Indeed, in the comparison that this chapter reports on there were many similar challenges and experiences. At KaHo Sint-Lieven University College in Belgium for example, it was reported that there is still a negative impression of office administrators who are considered to be the people responsible "for making tea and coffee for managers". The academics of KaHo Sint-Lieven University College therefore worked with the employers and members of local industry to change this impression of their graduates. As one of the academic staff members reported: "We work hard to remove the impression of office administrators as tea makers … the programme is in line with the needs of our employers and many of our students are office managers, and we are attracting more male students" (Belgium 1:2013).

For this reason, it was considered to be appropriate to benchmark the training of office managers in South Africa with international counterparts. The focus of this chapter is thus an international survey of the training of office managers. The aim of this comparison is to determine whether there is any consistency in the knowledge bases of the CPUT current and new qualifications for office managers and those of four international institutions offering similar curricula.

The curricula of four international institutions similar to those of the OM curriculum offered at CPUT were selected for analysis. The curricula were from KaHo Sint-Lieven University College in Belgium, a Polytechnic Institute of Porto in Portugal, Morrisville State College USA and an Institute of Technology Carlow in Ireland. There are two levels of discussion in this chapter, firstly, the analysis of each curriculum, drawing on the dimension of Semantics of LCT (section 5.2), since only the core syllabi were available to the researcher, and secondly, the summary of the findings of the analysis (section 5.3).

The terms "secretaries" and "secretarial studies" are now very rarely used at most of the institutions in this research project.

5.2 International curricula

One of the four institutions was visited and contact was made online with academics at the three other institutions. Documentation was provided on the core syllabi and verification obtained from interviews with the personnel of KaHo Sint-Lieven University College, and by means of email correspondence with academics at the other institutions. The study of curricular documents aimed to establish whether the core curricula of the international institutions showed consensus with the knowledge areas drawn on in the OM curriculum.

Curricula which are similar to those of the National Diploma are the Bachelor of Office Management curriculum offered at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College, the Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation offered at the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, the Office Administration and Office Management Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) Degree offered at Morrisville State College USA, and the Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management offered at the Institute of Technology Carlow in Ireland. The credit distribution of three of these curricula is based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) system comprising a student-centred system for credit accrual and transfer and established on the workload students require to achieve expected learning outcomes (European Commission, 2009:11). The Office Administration–Office Management curriculum of Morrisville State College USA utilises the Credit Hour system, which is a time-based reference for calculating educational achievement used by American universities and colleges that enables student learning to be documented and transferred across a variety of institutions (Shedd, 2003:11).

5.2.1 KaHo Sint-Lieven University College: Bachelor of Management Assistant Languages

The researcher was given the opportunity in 2013 to visit KaHo Sint-Lieven University College in Belgium that has Dutch, colloquially referred to as Flemish, as the official language. The Bachelor of OM curriculum is divided into the Management Assistant Languages (MA) curriculum and the Medical Management Assistant (MMA) curriculum. For the purpose of this research project, the focus is on the Management Assistant Languages major of the OM curriculum, which is more closely aligned with the National Diploma curriculum. The Management Assistant Languages curriculum comprises 180 ECTS credits, offered over three years with a distribution of 60 credits per year. The programme aims for graduates to be involved in all aspects of organisations at which they are employed, and for

the graduates to have excellent practical language skills that would make them indispensable in the international workplace (KaHo Sint-Lieven University College, 2013:1).

Graduates entering the workplace with a Bachelor of Management Assistant Languages qualification usually find work as management assistants in the fields of public relations, marketing, sales, and personnel selection. Students study Communication in their mother tongue, namely, Dutch and they also study English, French, German or Spanish. During the sixth semester all the students enter internships at international institutions or at local companies, or "if students wish to work at another company not on the list they need to motivate the reasons for this choice" (Belgium 1, 2013). The Bachelor of Management Assistant Languages is a professional degree and therefore students cannot continue with the master's degree, but will need one more year of study to obtain an academic bachelor's degree whereafter they may continue with the master's degree.

There are no entry requirements for the OM curriculum at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College. Students may apply for entry if they have qualified at any of the three levels of secondary schools of the country. These qualifications include the General Certificate, which is similar to GCSEs of the UK, the Technical Secondary Certificate, which includes, for example, commerce and languages, and the vocational education qualification where students qualify with a trade. The "freedom of choice policy" of the Belgian education system means that students can apply to any university or college (Belgium 1, 2013). Usually 25 to 30 students enter the Management Assistant Languages programme annually. There are 170 OM students across all levels, 60 of whom are distance students. The OM curriculum is "flexible and the timetable can change weekly to accommodate the student, who is considered to be the client" (Belgium 1, 2013).

Semantics: work-based projects
The OM curriculum is directed by themes of people and society, information and presentation, business and organisation, and practice and project work. For example, the content of the theme of people and society includes the study of communication, languages, and entrepreneurship. The theme of information and presentation includes the study of information and communications technologies and word processing skills (Table 5.1).

The Advisory Committee comprising members of the local business community has considerable input into the curriculum. There is a close relationship with employers in the community to ensure regular updates to the course content, which suggests the deep contextuality of the programme. The stronger practical and contextual (stronger semantic

gravity) component of this programme is evident in the emphasis on the study of information and communications technology, including presentation software, word processing, spreadsheets, and multi-media, the practical and work-based project components at each level, and the six-month internship component.

The information and communications technology academic commented, "this is obviously an important area of knowledge and skills for the success of the graduate but the emphasis is on the application" (Belgium 2, 2013). At recent advisory committee meetings the employers expressed their satisfaction with the information and communications technology curriculum, but expressed the need for accounting packages and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software products. The information and communications technology academic argued that while the institution attempts to take the employers' needs into account, the introduction of these software packages may not be possible to implement since they are usually "tailor made specifically for the companies" (Belgium 2, 2013).

There is a strong practical component throughout the curriculum which is closely associated with the field of practice and thus comprises stronger semantic gravity (SG+). Subjects such as Marketing, Human Resource Management, Sales and Entrepreneurship are also offered. Case studies, exercises, practical projects and the application of theory are used and discussions are encouraged in the classroom. Most of the second-year syllabi consist of case studies and are practically orientated. For example, the "simulation of skills, team, project work and presentations are very important" (Belgium 1:2013). The programme is flexible and there are options for students to specialise, for example, "students receive human resource management in the first year but can then choose to specialise in the second year" (Belgium 1, 2013).

During the second year, students have a one-week social internship at non-profit organisations. The emphasis during the second and third years is on integrated work-based projects designed in collaboration with the employers in the community. Students are required to do research in the workplace and attend classes two or three days per week. During the sixth semester, students enter internships in the workplace but may attend class once a month to receive tuition in areas where they require additional training or to receive assistance with any difficulties they are experiencing in the workplace.

Table 5.1: Course content and credit distribution for the Bachelor of Management Assistant Languages

FIRST YEAR	ECTS
Semester one	
People and society: Communication – writing for business and texts	3 x 2 credits
English and French	4 x 2 credits
German/Spanish	3 credits
Information and presentation: basics and presentation software	3 credits
Business and organisation: Economics	4 credits
Institutions and law: Civil Law and European topics	4 credits
Business Organisation	3 credits
Total	31 credits
Semester two	
People and society: Socially responsible entrepreneurship	3 credits
English and French	4 x 2 credits
German/Spanish	3 credits
Information and presentation: word processing and booster	3 credits
Business and organisation: ethics	
Financial and trading techniques	3 credits
Marketing and Human Resource Management	3 credits
Practical and projects: Team and project management	6 credits
Total	29 credits
SECOND YEAR	ECTS
Semester three	
People and society: Communication – internal and external	3 credits
English and French	4 x 2 credits
Information and presentation: spreadsheets and multimedia	7 credits
Business and organisation: quality and innovation	3 credits
Practical and projects: orientation	3 credits
Elective A/B/C	
Elective A; German/Spanish and Extra German/Spanish	6 credits
Elective B: German/Spanish and Sales	6 credits
Elective C: German/Spanish and Human Resource Management	6 credits
Total	30 credits
Semester four	
People and society: English and French	4 x 2 credits
Information and presentation: word processing and multi-media	6 credits
Business and organisation: task and time management	6 credits
Practical and projects: intercultural and events management	4 credits
Elective A/B/C	
Elective A; German/Spanish and Extra German/Spanish	6 credits
Elective B: German/Spanish and Account Management	6 credits
Elective C: German/Spanish and Human Resource Management	6 credits
Total	30 credits
THIRD YEAR	ECTS
Semester five	
People and society: social responsibility and entrepreneurship	3 credits
English and French	3 x 2 credits
Information and presentation: data control	10 credits
Elective A/B/C	
Elective A: German/Spanish and Extra German/Spanish and project	14 credits
Elective B: German/Spanish and Marketing and project	14 credits
Elective C: German/Spanish and Social Law and project	14 credits
Total	33 credits
Semester six	
Project	7 credits
International or local practical	20 credits
Total	27 credits

There is also a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation and thus evidence of stronger semantic density (SD+) in the curriculum, which is provided by the emphasis on languages and communication. For example, students are required to learn the technical skills for the composition of essays and business documentation, since "business writing is essential" (Belgium 3, 2013). Students study business writing skills in Dutch, English, French, German or Spanish, and internal and external communication skills. These skills are essential for a country where the EU's headquarters, as well as those of several other major international organisations such as NATO, are based, and expertise in international languages and communication skills is considered vital to gaining employment.

Students are required to study law, with the emphasis on Civil Law and European topics. The "students have social law where they learn employment, human resource management regulations, contracts and leave issues" (Belgium 5, 2013). One semester of Financial and Trading Techniques, Economics, and Account Management is offered, which aims at making students familiar with accounting and economic principles. For example, "students learn budgeting, emphasis on documents and what to do with them (Belgium 4, 2013). The aim of these syllabi is to "teach students argumentation skills underpinned by expertise" and "practical examples are used and discussions encouraged in the classroom" (Belgium 1, 2013).

Students enrolled at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College for the OM curriculum are evaluated continuously and at the end of the semester there is an assessment period where formal tests are written. The Head of Department described the underpinning of the curriculum as comprising "50% theoretical and 50% practical knowledge".

5.2.2 The Polytechnic Institute of Porto: Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation

The Polytechnic Institute of Porto has more than 4 000 students and offers undergraduate and graduate curricula in Marketing, Accounting, International Commerce, and Administrative Assistance and Translation. The institution is equipped with the latest technologically advanced multimedia and marketing centres. The institution makes use of the *Projecto de Apoio Online* Support Project (PAOL), which is based on the Moodle learning platform. The programme aims to help students and academics foster different approaches for the teaching and learning process (Polytechnic Institute of Porto, n.d.). The qualification Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation (Table 5.2) is based on course work comprising 180 ECTS credits and follows a semester system of 30 credits per semester.

Table 5.2: Course content and credit distribution for the Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation

FIRST YEAR:	ECTS
Winter semester	
Business and Organisational Documentation 1	3 credits
Communication Theory and Textual Practice	4 credits
Business English 1	5 credits
German Language 1/Russian Language 1	5 credits
French Language 1/Spanish Language 1	5 credits
Applied Computer Science 1	5 credits
Introduction to Economics 1	3 credits
Total:	30 credits
Summer semester	
Business and Organisational Documentation 2	3 credits
Technical Writing	4 credits
Business English 2	5 credits
German Language 2/Russian Language 2	5 credits
French Language 2/Spanish Language 2	5 credits
Applied Computer Science 2	5 credits
Fundamentals of Law	3 credits
Total:	30 credits
SECOND YEAR	ECTS
Winter semester	
Organisational Communication 1	5 credits
Electronic Tools Applied to Translation 1/ Quantitative Methods and Statistics	5 credits
Business English 3	5 credits
German Language 3/Russian Language 3/French Language3/Spanish Language 3	5 credits
Introduction to Accounting 1/Text Linguistics 1	5 credits
Organisation Management /Introduction to Translation Theories	5 credits
Total:	30 credits
Summer semester	
Organisational Communication 2	4 credits
Electronic Tools Applied to Translation 2/Quantitative Methods and Statistics 2	3 credits
Business English 4	5 credits
German Language 4/ Russian Language 4	5 credits
French Language 4/ Spanish Language 4	5 credits
Introduction to Accounting 2/Text Linguistics 2	5 credits
Enterprise Law	3 credits
Total:	30 credits
THIRD YEAR	ECTS
Winter semester	
Administrative Assistance Simulation 1	6 credits
Translation of Technical Texts 1 – English	5 credits
Translation of Technical Texts 1 – German or Russian	5 credits
Translation of Technical Texts 1 – French or Spanish	5 credits
Intercultural Studies	3 credits
Human Relations	3 credits
Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting 1	3 credits
Total:	30 credits
Summer semester	
Administrative Assistant Simulation 2	7.5 credits
Business Archives	2.5 credits
Translation of Technical Texts 2 – English	4.5 credits
Translation of Technical Texts 2 – German or Russian	4.5 credits
Translation of Technical Texts 2 – French or Spanish	4.5 credits
Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting 2	4.5 credits
Professional Ethics and Deontology	2 credits
Total:	30 credits

The Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation qualification is a two-year programme and the mission is: "To train, research, create and disseminate culture, knowledge and services in the business field" (Portugal 1, 2014). The entry requirements are 12th grade, where students have to pass one national exam in English, French and Portuguese. There are 45 fulltime students and 45 part-time students per annum (Polytechnic Institute of Porto, n.d.).

Semantics: languages and translation

The curriculum comprises a strong practical component with close association with practice and thus evidence of stronger semantic gravity (SG+). This content includes the electronic tools applied to translation and interpreting, simulation of the translation of technical texts and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, Applied Computer Science, Business and Organisational Documentation, and one semester of Human Relations, Intercultural Studies, and Organisational Management. A period of internship in the workplace is not an official requirement of the curriculum, but students may undertake internships voluntarily.

This curriculum also has a strong theoretical and conceptual component which is evidence of stronger semantic density (SD+). This content includes the study of Communication Theory, Organisational Communication, Business English, German, Russian, French or Spanish, an introduction to Economics and Accounting, Fundamentals of Law, and Enterprise Law. The mode of assessment comprises continuous and final assessments. The Head of Department described the degree as being underpinned by "60% theoretical knowledge and 40% practical knowledge" (Portugal 1, 2014).

5.2.3 Morrisville State College USA: the Office Administration – Office Management A.A.S. Degree

In 1964, the National Association of Secretaries in the USA adopted the word "secretary" to describe an assistant to a senior manager or executive (Russon, 1983:33). Secretaries were described as possessing expertise in office skills and the ability to assume unsupervised responsibility, display initiative, judgement, and decision-making skills (Russon, 1983:33). As in the South African context, this has not always been the general public's impression of the role of secretaries.

Morrisville State College USA was given a Tier 2 grading by the US News and World Report as being among the finest regional colleges in the North where the Associate of Applied Science in Office Administration – Office Management Degree is offered. The *New York Times* called it "a college at the forefront of a technological revolution". Morrisville State College USA is considered one of the most technologically advanced

colleges in the country. IBM ThinkPad computers are integrated into the way students work, learn and live. The campus features the fastest wireless network connection in the world (Morrisville State College USA, n.d).

The Office Administration – Office Management A.A.S curriculum aims to afford students an opportunity to train using the latest office equipment and to acquire a thorough understanding of the administration of staff and resources in an office situation. The emphasis of the curriculum is on learning a wide range of computer software, for example, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Access, Excel and Outlook. The two-year Associate Degree aims to ensure that graduates are suitably qualified to become a valued asset to the workplace through intensive skill-based syllabi (Morrisville State College USA, n.d). The entry requirements are the submission of a high school record, SAT/ACT scores (for bachelor's degrees and select associate degree programmes), a letter of recommendation, and a college essay (Morrisville State College USA, n.d). Morrisville State College USA makes use of a time-based reference which is the Credit Hour system utilised by American universities and colleges (Shedd, 2003:11).

Semantics: Business organisation and management
The curriculum of the Morrisville State College USA (Table 5.3) includes theoretical and conceptual content of Business Law and one semester of Business Mathematics, Accounting, Business Communication, Composition and Research, and Writing about Literature. However, the curriculum includes a stronger application and contextual component, and therefore a stronger semantic gravity and weaker semantic density component (SG+SD-).

The stronger application and close association with practice component (SG+) is evident in the ThinkPad university curriculum where laptop computers are assimilated into the teaching and learning environment. Students have access to advanced software through a campus-wide computer system and laptops which are also integrated into the Accounting courses. Students may also acquire Microsoft Office Specialist certification in a specific Office program which is a prerequisite to pursuing the higher-level certifications (Morrisville State College USA, n.d). Other practical and highly contextual content includes Office Administration Orientation, Business Organisation and Management, Human Resource Management, and Administrative Secretarial Support Processes, while electives include, for example, the study of Salesmanship, and Special Topics in Business. The assessment comprises continuous and summative examinations.

Students undertake an Office Technology Internship I/II during the final semester of the second year where they work with office managers and supervisors to learn the management of an office and gain firsthand experience of running meetings, decision making and delegation within the workplace (Morrisville State College USA, n.d.). The curriculum is considered to comprise "55% theoretical underpinnings and 45% application and implementation" (USA 1, 2014).

Table 5.3: Course content and credit distribution for the Office Administration - Office Management A.A.S. Degree

FIRST YEAR	Credits
Fall semester	
Business Mathematics:	3 credits
Composition and Research	3 credits
Keyboarding I	3 credits
Principles Computer Apps	3 credits
Maths/Science General Education Elective	3 credits
Office Administration Orientation	1 credit
Data Entry	1 credit
Total:	17 credits
Spring semester	
Writing about Literature	3 credits
Keyboarding II	3 credits
Document Design and Effective Communication	3 credits
Business Organisation and Management	3 credits
Human Resource Management	3 credits
Business Law I	3 credits
Total:	18 credits
SECOND YEAR	
Fall semester	
Machine Transcription	2 credits
Administrative Secretarial Support Procedures	3 credits
Document Design and Business Analysis	3 credits
Math/Science Elective	3 credits
Business Communication	3 credits
Social Science elective	3 credits
Total:	17 credits
Spring semester	
Accounting Info & Management Decisions	3 credits
Office Management	3 credits
Office technology Internship I/II	6 credits
Social Science elective	3 credits
Humanity/Math or Science/Social Science elective	3 credits
Total:	18 credits
Recommended Electives	
Business in the 21st century	
Business Law II	
Salesmanship	
Principles of Finance and Management	
Special Topics in Business	

5.2.4 Institute of Technology Carlow: Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management

In December 2013 the Institute of Technology Carlow in Ireland was recognised as the *Sunday Times* Institute of Technology for 2013/2014. The Institute of Technology Carlow has associations with business, government, voluntary sectors and the community. The External

Services functions of the Institute manage the support of enterprises in the community (Institute of Technology Carlow, n.d.).

The Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management curriculum focuses on offering students essential business knowledge, together with excellent communication and office administrative skills in order to meet the needs of organisations. The objective of the programme is to provide students with specialised training in office administration and technology offered in a modern simulated administration complex. The duration of the curriculum is two years comprising 120 ECTS credits, and students qualify as office administrators and office managers. Graduates find employment in a variety of industries, including financial institutions, banking, local authorities, and private organisations and qualify with a general business qualification; however they also have a comprehensive knowledge of the functioning of a modern office. The purpose of the programme is to ensure that graduates acquire knowledge and skills relating to the production of professional business documentation, written and oral communication, accounting, and organisational support skills (Institute of Technology Carlow, n.d.).

The entry requirements are a Leaving Certificate consisting of 5 subjects at Ordinary Level Grade D3 or better. The subjects required are English or Irish at Ordinary Level grade D3 or higher and Mathematics at Ordinary Level grade D3 or higher (Institute of Technology Carlow, n.d.). Students who graduate from this course are eligible to progress to year three of a Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Marketing/International Business/Business Management or to year two of the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting (Institute of Technology Carlow, n.d.).

Semantics: simulated office environment
The Higher Certificate in Business in OM curriculum (Table 5.4) at the Institute of Technology Carlow includes both strong theoretical and conceptual content, and practical and contextual content. The practical and contextual component which is evidence of stronger semantic gravity (SG+), includes the syllabi of Document Production, Quantitative Techniques, Office Administration, Management, Marketing and electives of Human Resource Management and Supply Chain Management. Students receive practical training in typing and document production skills. Students are also given extensive training in a simulated office environment which provides them with the opportunity to experience all aspects of technology appropriate to the effective operation of a modern office. There is no internship programme for the Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management

curriculum since internship opportunities are only offered to students who have successfully completed the entire course work for a relevant honours degree.

The strong theoretical and conceptual content and thus stronger semantic density (SD+) component of the curriculum, comprises the study of Financial Accounting, Economics, and Business Law. Students also have the opportunity to select from the electives of Business Psychology, Writing, Presentation and Research Skills, and French or German. The Head of Department considered the underpinning knowledge of the curriculum to be approximately "70% theory and 30% practical" (Ireland 1, 2014).

Table 5.4: Course content and credit distribution for the Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management

YEAR 1	ECTS
Mandatory Syllabi:	
Document Production1	5 credits
Office Administration 1	5 credits
Management	10 credits
Financial Accounting 1	10 credits
Quantitative Techniques	10 credits
Economics 1	10 credits
Plus one elective:	10 credits
French 1/German 1	
Business Psychology	
Writing, Presentation & Research Skills	
TOTAL:	60 credits
YEAR 2	ECTS
Mandatory Syllabi:	
Document Production 2	5 credits
Office Administration 2	5 credits
Management Accounting	10 credits
Business Law	10 credits
Marketing	10 credits
Plus two electives	
French 2/German 2	10 x 2 = 20 credits
Human Resource Management	
Supply Chain Management	
Economics 2	
Financial Accounting 2	
TOTAL:	60 credits

5.3 Summary and implications of the findings

The findings of the semantic analysis are useful but not totally accurate, as the researcher did not have access to assessment tasks and projects. The broad overview revealed that most of the curricula comprise both strong theoretical and conceptual components, and strong implementation and contextual components. However, the responses of the academics were often inaccurate, as academics in professional fields often think that if a subject is taught in a theoretical manner that it is considered theoretical in nature. The professional curricula

comprise recontextualised content from the field of practice but are taught as theoretical pedagogy in the form of lectures. This is a code clash (Howard & Maton, 2011:202), constituting practice-based subjects taught in a theoretical way. This is inappropriate, but often the easiest method for the academics, given the lack of resources and timetable constraints, rather than their trying to develop exercises which may be simulated in computer laboratories.

The Bachelor of Management Assistant Languages at the KaHo Sint-Lieven University College is based on a knowledge base of service to learning and support of administrative services in the workplace. This is supported by the curricular themes of people and society, information and presentation, business and organisation, practice and project work. The curriculum comprises both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density components (SG+SD+) and has clear knower code characteristics evidenced in the choice of subjects of communication and languages. The ideal knower of the curriculum is proficient in languages and in communication, and has information and communication technologies, as well as business and organisational knowledge and skills.

The Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation at the Polytechnic Institute of Porto is based on a knowledge base of language ability and support of translation services. The curriculum comprises both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+) components. It also comprises predominantly knower code characteristics as seen in the subject choices of subjects such as Business English, German, Russian, French, and Spanish. The ideal knower of this curriculum is proficient in languages and understands documentation and presentation, and has skills to assist business language services.

The Office Administration – Office Management A.A.S Degree at the Morrisville State College USA is based on a knowledge base of business organisation, and management and support of administrative services in the workplace. This is evidenced by the choice of subjects of Office Administration and Office Management, Business Organisation and Management, Business Communication and Human Resource Management. The curriculum comprises stronger semantic gravity and weaker semantic density (SG+SD-) components and has predominantly knower code qualities. The ideal knower of this curriculum is a proficient manager who has information and communications technology knowledge and skills as well as communication and people skills.

The Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management at the Institute of Technology Carlow has its foundation in a knowledge base of organisational support for office management services and the production of professional business documentation. The curriculum comprises both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+) components. It has predominantly knower code qualities as seen in the choice of subjects of Office Administration, Marketing, French or German, Business Psychology and Human Resource Management. The ideal knower of this curriculum has strong management and people skills, and knowledge of languages.

The findings show that the course content of the four international curricula is similar to that of the current curriculum. The Mercantile Law syllabus is not a component of any of the international curricula, and the Polytechnic Institute of Porto and the Institute of Technology Carlow do not have internship components of the curricula. However, the rest of the course content comprises the same content as the National Diploma: OM curriculum in varying degrees of duration and emphasis. The implications of these findings are that the international curricula comprise a variety of practices.

Most of the curricula are more language orientated and emphasise systems, information and communications technology, and people skills. Table 5.5 presents the summary of the course content of each of the international curricula and the course content of the current National Diploma curriculum. To establish the knowledge base of the international OM programmes, the findings from the analysis show that the core of the curricula is languages and communication, planning, and the management of people, with strong components of information and communications technology, knowledge and skills, and some components of financial and legal knowledge.

In the next chapter the subject offerings and credit allocations of the new Diploma: OM curriculum, are discussed. The analysis of the new curriculum to determine the positional and relational autonomy, the semantic gravity and semantic density, as well as the ideal office manager is explained.

Table 5.5: Summary of the course content of the National Diploma: Office Management and international curricula

The current SA Diploma OM	Bachelor of Management Assistant Languages offered at KaHo Sint-Lieven University College	Bachelor of Administrative Assistance and Translation offered at the Polytechnic Institute of Porto	Office Administration – Office Management A.A.S Degree offered at the Morrisville State College USA	Higher Certificate in Business in Office Management offered at the Institute of Technology Carlow
Information Administration	Information and Presentation: word processing, presentation software, spreadsheets, multi-media, data control	Applied Computer Science 1 & 2, Electronic Tools applied to Translation/Quantitative Methods and Statistics 1 & 2, Business and Organisational Documentation 1 & 2	Keyboarding 1 & 2, Principles Computer Applications, Data Entry, Machine Transcription	Document Production 1 & 2 Quantitative Techniques
Business Administration	Business and Organisation: business organisation, quality and innovation, socially responsible entrepreneurship, task and time management, ethics	Professional Ethics and Deontology, Intercultural Studies Elective: Organisational Management	Office Administration Orientation, Business Organisation and Management, Administrative Secretarial Support Procedures, Office Management Electives: Business in the 21st century and Special Topics in Business	Office Administration 1 & 2, management Elective: Supply Chain Management
Communication	Communication: writing for business and texts, internal and external communication Languages: English, French, German or Spanish	Communication Theory and Textual practice, Technical Writing, Intercultural Studies, Business English 1, 2, 3 & 4, Organisational Communication 1 & 2 Elective: Text Linguistics 1 & 2 and Introduction to Translation Theories Languages: German or Russian, French or Spanish Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting 1 & 2, translation of texts English, German or Russian, French or Spanish	Composition and Research, Writing about Literature, Document Design and Effective Communication, Business Communication	Electives: Writing, Presentation & Research Skills Languages: French 1 & 2 or German 1 & 2
Personnel Management	Human Resource Management and Marketing	Human Relations	Human Resource Management	Electives: Human Resource Management and Business Psychology Marketing
Financial Accounting	Economics, Financial and Trading Techniques Elective: Account Management	Introduction to Economics Elective: Introduction to Accounting 1 & 2	Business Mathematics, Accounting Information and Management Decisions Elective: Principles of Finance and Management	Economics 1, Financial Accounting 1, Management Accounting Electives: Economics 2, Financial Accounting 2
Legal Practice	Institutions and Law: Civil and European topics Elective: Social Law	Fundamentals of Law, Enterprise Law	Business Law 1 Elective: Business Law 2	Business Law
Mercantile Law	X	X	X	X
OM Practical	Team and Project Management, Intercultural and Events Management, 6 months' internship	Administrative Assistance Simulation 1 & 2 **No internship**	ThinkPad – laptop assimilation, Internship final semester	Simulated office environment **No internship**

CHAPTER 6: TOWARDS A NEW OFFICE MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

> I would love to see the name changed from OM to something else as everybody has the same first thought of us as an over-qualified secretary (DS3G7).

6.1 Introduction

During the period of apartheid, the South African higher education system consisted of two types of higher education institutions, namely technikons and universities. Technikons provided diploma-level higher education, usually, although not always, in technical fields. After the Technikon Act of 1993, technikons could offer degrees and were essentially degree-awarding universities but without using the name "university" (Du Pré, 2009: vii). The Higher Education Act, Act No. 101 of 1997 changed the landscape of South African higher education, attempting to address the "fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency that are the legacy of the past" (DoE, 1997a: Foreword). To encourage diversity in the higher education system (DoE, 1997a:13) the nomenclature of higher education institutions was changed to "universities", "comprehensive universities", and "universities of technology". South African universities of technology were thus created by decree, in a way that was similar to the creation of the post-1992 universities in the UK. That is, they were not expected to meet any particular criteria to be awarded the title "university of technology" – unlike, for example, in Ireland, where the polytechnics and institutions of technology are expected to meet certain criteria before they are acknowledged as fully fledged universities (e.g., Elwood, 2010:67).

The South African higher education system is hierarchical, with research-intensive universities occupying the highest level, the comprehensive universities focusing on mass higher education, and the universities of technology focusing on technology-based qualifications. In 1997, the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) considered the suggestion for the name classification to universities of technology. At the time this suggestion did not have sufficient support (Du Pré, 2009:vii) as it was contended that technikons had made considerable progress since 1995, and had in fact overtaken some traditional universities in terms of research outputs (notably the historically disadvantaged universities that were under-developed during apartheid). The role and position of South African universities of technology within the National Plan for South African higher education is a topic of debate (e.g., Cloete, 2012). The South African universities of technology are still under construction, trying to identify their institutional "distinctiveness", including the types of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications they will offer and the research centres they will support. It is a sector in which there is considerable internal diversity, as is common in higher education systems under development (Clark, 2004:92),

with some universities of technology showing progress in the establishment of research centres, industry and science council partnerships and the successful graduation of master's and doctoral students.

There have been diverse opinions on the inclusion of courses such as the National Diploma in OM in the university system, but for the time being, at any rate, this qualification will remain. The recently promulgated White Paper on Post-School Education (DHET, 2013:xii) explains the need in South Africa for strong Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) colleges, and until such colleges exist, universities of technology will offer programmes that might be more appropriately located in the TVET system. In the light of its varied history and its continuing difficulties of location, the OM curriculum is a region that will, as Bernstein put it, struggle to "constitute its own order" (Bernstein, 2000:33).

An important piece of higher education legislation is the new Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2013a:15) that requires all higher education institutions to submit their programmes to the Council on Higher Education for approval. The approval process has three main categories: Category A (no changes to the curriculum), Category B (50% or fewer revisions to the curriculum) and Category C (more than a 50% revision, or a new qualification) (CHE, 2011:3). This chapter offers an analysis of the revised Diploma in OM that developed in response to the Category B curriculum analysis and review. The focus of the chapter is the knowledge bases of the new diploma, and how these were decided upon. In this chapter a brief description of the new Diploma in OM is provided; this is followed by an analysis of the institutional discourses that regulate the curriculum logic and curricular structure, drawing on three dimensions of LCT: Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation.

6.2 The revised Diploma in Office Management: the past is still with us

As part of the process of revising the diploma, a situational analysis was undertaken to establish the content for the revised diploma. Input was obtained from the Delphi surveys (conducted as part of the research for this study), DACUM and curriculum workshops, third-year student and alumni surveys, and additional documentary data derived from the international benchmarking and comparison of OM-type programmes (conducted as part of the research for this study). The CPUT Category B curriculum analysis and review template (CPUT, 2014a:2) advocates the need for administrators in all areas of the economy. This is derived from the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) skills plan that lists office administrators as an area of critical shortage (SA Education, Training and Development Practices, 2010:62). The report lists some

of the skills of office administrators as those of communication, data capturing, time management, and report writing, amongst others. The skills of general secretaries were identified as minute taking, filing management, and bookkeeping, amongst others (SA Education, Training and Development Practices, 2010:62). The skills of office administrators and general secretaries are needed at all business levels of the economy.

The proposed Diploma in OM consists of 366 credits positioned at level 6 of the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (roughly equivalent to second-year university level). Table 6.1 shows the distribution of credits for the current National Diploma in OM and the new Diploma in OM curriculum, as well as the name changes of the subject offerings.

Table 6.1: Subject offerings and distribution of credits

Current National Diploma in OM		New Diploma in OM	
Syllabi	**Distribution of credits**	**Syllabi**	**Distribution of credits**
Information Admin 1	36	**Business Information Systems 1**	18
		Business Applications 1	24
Information Admin 2	36	**Business Information Systems 2**	24
		Business Applications 2	24
Information Admin 3	40	**Business Information Systems 3**	18
		Business Applications 3	18
Business Admin 1	36	**Business Admin 1**	24
Business Admin 2	36	**Business Admin 2**	24
Business Admin 3	40	**Business Admin 3**	18
Communication 1	20	**Communication 1**	18
Communication 2	20	**Communication 2**	18
Personnel Management 1	14	**Workplace Psychology**	12
Financial Accounting 1	14	**Business Accounting**	18
Legal Practice 1	14	**Legal Practice**	18
Mercantile Law	20	**Law of Contract**	18
OM Practical Module A	14	**OM Practices**	60
OM Practical Module B	20		
		Diversity Management	12
Total: 14 syllabi	360	**Totals (17 subjects)**	366

6.2.1 "Subject content equivalent to the industry"

The revision of the current Information Administration subjects resulted in a separation of the content lectured in the classroom and the content taught in the laboratories. The content taught in the classroom is named Business Information Systems and the laboratory content is called Business Applications. These subjects are considered a distinguishing feature of the

revised programme that places considerable emphasis on "new computer applications required in office management environments", claiming that stakeholders require administrative staff to be "technology-savvy"; hence the Diploma in OM includes "a greater emphasis on computer application requirements in business" (CPUT, 2014a:7,9). The Business Information Systems and Business Applications subjects have increased from 112 to 126 credits. The Business Information Systems subjects comprise 60 of the 126 credits. The first-year level is positioned at level 5 of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, comprising 18 credits, the second-year syllabus, level 6, comprises 24 credits, and the third-year syllabus, also level 6, comprises 18 credits.

The Business Applications subjects contain 66 credits with 24 credits at the first-year level, 24 credits at the second-year level, and 18 credits at the third-year level.

The credit allocation for the Business Administration subjects has decreased from 112 credits allocated to the current National Diploma in OM to 66 credits in the new qualification. The first-year level, Business Administration, comprises 24 credits, the second-year level, comprises 24 credits and the third year comprises 18 credits. The Communication subjects, at first- and second-year level, comprise 18 credits each; this represents a reduction from the 20 credits distributed to each in the current programme. The subject previously known as Personnel Management has been renamed Workplace Psychology, positioned at level 5 of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (i.e., first-year level), comprising 12 credits.

Financial Accounting has been renamed Business Accounting, and is positioned at level 5, the first-year level, and has increased from 14 to 18 credits to align with the standardisation of the subject within the Faculty of Business. The Legal Practice syllabus, also at level 5, increased from 14 to 18 credits. The Mercantile Law syllabus was renamed Law of Contract and is positioned at level 5 and has a slight reduction from 20 to 18 credits. The Module A component of the OM Practical was eliminated and the Module B component amended. In the submission to the Council on Higher Education, the OM Practical subject was renamed OM Practices; it is at level 6, comprising 60 credits. A new subject, Diversity Management, positioned at level 5 and comprising 12 credits, has been included in the curriculum.

The emphasis is clearly on the computer applications component of the programme. While this emphasis is associated with the drive, since the early twentieth century, towards productivity through systems management and computerisation (Solberg, 2014:2), there is irony in repeating the errors of the past in which training focused on the "mechanics" of

communication to the detriment of communication itself, the principal knowledge area. In the new version of the OM diploma there is a similar emphasis on communication "technology" and a neglect of communication "practice". Workplace representatives understand the changing technology and value its inclusion in the curriculum, for example, a Delphi panel member expressed the need for "more up-to-date technology from industry" (DS3G12), but have tended to underestimate the need for the underpinning communication knowledge field – although the same panel member also pointed out that the "subject content should be equivalent to the industry" – but was not able to name this "subject content". This is hardly surprising, given the many years of neglect of language and communication in the training of secretaries.

The submission to the Council on Higher Education describes the Diploma as "vocationally-oriented and greater emphasis is put on the ability of the student to apply knowledge" (CPUT, 2014a:7). As with similar qualifications internationally, the emphasis is on "application" and its ability "to provide direct benefits for the workplace" (Hordern, 2014: 389). The knowledge that graduates should be able to apply is communication, as one panel member suggests: "More time should be given to writing, presentations and communication" (DS3E21) as core functions of office work. But this core, underpinning subject is reduced to 36 credits out of 366, or almost 10% of the total credit value, thereby further devaluing the role of written and oral business communication and its associated literacy practices.

6.3 Positional and relational autonomy in the Diploma: Office Management
In this section the choices made for curricular selection in the new Diploma in OM, and the institutional discourses that regulate the curriculum logic, are examined. The Autonomy codes of LCT are drawn on to analyse the institutional and higher education policies and directives that have determined the development of the new Diploma in OM.

6.3.1 Strengthening positional autonomy: appropriation of bureaucratic and academic discourses
The discourse of higher education has taken on the terminology of performance management and branding as business metaphors to describe teaching and research practices. For example, the use of terminology which refers to the student as "client", research as "output" and academic departments as "productivity units" is prevalent in higher education (Clare & Sivil, 2014:62). Schrecker (2010:154) argues that this "increasingly market-oriented set of priorities … reinforces the university's long-standing hierarchical structures while weakening its traditional intellectual and professional commitments". Bureaucratisation of the higher

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education sector has changed the "nature of teaching and the teacher" (Clare & Sivil, 2014: 66) as the "possibility of spontaneity at the teaching level is reduced" and the student body changed to a "client-public" (Page, 1951:96). This discourse has been embraced by CPUT's Business Faculty and strongly applied to curriculum revision processes in the faculty. The curriculum revision processes are being conducted by actors from within the institution and include the standardisation of certain subjects across the faculty which is explained below.

The changing higher education context resulting from the promulgated Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (SAQA, 2013:6) required revision of existing qualifications and the development of new qualifications. CPUT embarked on a process to align its programmes with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework and selected the "Category B" framework that allowed for a 50% or less revision of programmes originating from the Convenor Technikon system (CHE, 2011:4). The choice made by the Business Faculty, with regard to the Diploma in OM, was firstly, a "horizontal alignment" that involved the "standardisation" of a number of first-year subjects across qualifications as varied as Accountancy, Entrepreneurship, Human Resource Management, Marketing – and OM. The "horizontal alignment" was done by senior faculty staff, largely for reasons of "economies of scale" and for "streamlining" the first year. This does make business sense in the light of the large numbers of students in the faculty, but does not make sense in terms of valuing the core knowledge areas of the different business fields. A possible reason is that although the OM staff was consulted on the curriculum revision process, owing to the managerialist cultures adopted in the faculty, curricular decision making was done outside of the OM Department. For example, the standardisaton of Communication, Accounting, Economics and Legal studies within the Business Faculty. This has maintained stronger positional autonomy (PA+) in decision making, but by faculty managers, not by the academics who teach on the programme.

In June 2014, the OM Department submitted the new Diploma in OM to the Higher Education Qualifications Council. The Diploma in OM stated that its purpose was to "provide the business world with multi-skilled office administrators who are equipped with technological, communication and managerial [*sic*] skills, and who are able to manage information efficiently, so as to contribute meaningfully to any organisation" (CPUT, 2014a:2).

The transformation in higher education in South Africa post-1994 at a local level aimed to attain democratisation, and at a global level to bring higher education in South Africa in line with international standards and practices (refer to sections 1.3.5 and 1.3.5.1). Luckett argues that despite greater state control to realise the "transformation imperative" in post-apartheid South Africa in higher education, and "apart from professional requirements, the curriculum has remained largely a sacred academic space and responsibility" (Luckett, 2009:443). Regarding issues of the curriculum, the South African Council on Higher Education argues that:

> The focus … is on creating an enabling structure for the development of curricula that meet South Africa's contemporary needs, rather than on curriculum content or orientation … curriculum development is the responsibility of the institutions. In view of the importance attached to diversification of the higher education sector, an appropriate curriculum structure should have the flexibility to enable individual institutions to design their programmes in ways that accord with their missions, resources, niches and student profiles. However, the parameters within which institutions design curricula are set by the State (CHE, 2013b:102-103).

The academic rationale for the Diploma: OM curriculum is that graduates will provide

> … independent and competent management support in the form of office and information administration, demonstrating various administrative and communication skills, as well as elementary and/or advanced skills in legal and human resource environments, which will enable them to plan and execute tasks creatively, professionally and efficiently in accordance with national and international standards in this field (CPUT, 2014a:8).

The curriculum documents prepared for submission to the Council on Higher Education could be described as giving evidence of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3), while graduates will be expected to demonstrate "various administrative and communication skills", the knowledge bases underpinning these "skills" is not specified. Instead, there is further detail on the technology and computer applications as on completion of the Diploma the graduate should be able to

> demonstrate proficiency in relevant business applications and input at a rate of 35 wpm and be able to analyse the various components of a modern organisational information system, its impact on people and the business environment and its importance for decision-making at all levels of management. Graduates should show an in-depth knowledge and demonstrated proficiency in applying the relevant administrative principles relating to the acquisition, maintenance and development of human resources … and demonstrate an understanding of the importance of communication in interpersonal as well as corporate contexts, and communicate effectively both orally and in writing, in professional environments. The graduate should be able to apply specific legal principles, give advice, and exercise the necessary legal support within the different office environments, and apply ethics of

professionalism in the workplace. Graduates should demonstrate proficiency in business accounting practices and be able to solve related problems (CPUT, 2014a:9).

Graduates will be expected to "show an in-depth knowledge and demonstrated proficiency in applying the relevant administrative principles" – although what this "in-depth knowledge" encompasses is not specified.

Developments in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (e.g. SAQA, 2013) have strengthened the autonomy of universities of technology, who have control over the design of revised curricula. For example, the faculty directives for "standardisation" are evidence that the control is internal and in the hands of the institution, maintaining stronger positional autonomy of managers (PA+), but possibly weakening the positional autonomy of academics and thereby creating tensions in positional autonomy. Maton describes the contemporary government policy of agents within higher education (PA+) remaining responsible for accomplishing political policy goals by means of principles drawn from external fields of practice (RA-), as a "contradictory modality of autonomy" (Maton, 2005:700). The tensions in autonomy created by the marketisation and bureaucratisation of the higher education sector, forces academics to be dutiful to both institutional culture and economy (Maton, 2005:701). This is evident in the bureaucratisation of the curriculum revision process, and the resulting tensions within academic departments.

6.3.2 Strengthening relational autonomy: faculty directives and "horizontal alignment"

The term "relational autonomy" (Maton, 2005:697) refers to whether the guiding principles are developed from the inside (the university) or from the outside (the state, industry or market). The structure of academic departments within CPUT's Business Faculty reflects the professional world (the outside), rather than the academic world (the inside). Departments have names that reflect the outside world: Department of Marketing, Department of Human Resource Management, Department of Auditing, Department of Entrepreneurship, and the Department of Office Management. The logic of the departmental structure was the programme, such as a Diploma in Internal Auditing or a Degree in Marketing. As all professional programmes draw on a combination of pure (singulars) and applied disciplines (regions) (Bernstein, 2000:52), it made sense that where there was a need to include the disciplines of Accountancy, Communication, Economics or Law in a particular programme, that academics with qualifications and specialisation in these disciplines would be "embedded" into the programme-based departments.

Recent changes to the Faculty of Business have introduced stronger positional autonomy in the way it has used discipline-based departments (such as Economics and Law) to "service" the business programmes. In a document signalling these changes to the Academic Planning Committee, the Business Faculty drew on a 2005 document, the "Faculty Configuration Scenario" to argue for a stronger disciplinary structure in the faculty. In this document, an academic unit is defined as a "team of academic and support staff members attached to an academic department/school/faculty where its students are drawn from its ambient location" (CPUT Faculty Configuration Scenario, 2005: 5) and it stipulates "… its administration, management and governance shall be determined by its ambient faculty" (CPUT, 2005:5). The Faculty Configuration Scenario describes departments as necessary for "the development of a vibrant teaching and learning environment" in order to establish "a scholarly culture of intellectual exchange and research", and enable "an academically productive community of practice" (CPUT, 2005:2). This provided the rationale for the formation of discipline-based departments or units within the Business Faculty. An Applied Law Unit was created to offer generic law subjects to programmes, and a Professional Communication Unit was established to offer similarly generic communication courses. Similar developments are evident in the plans for Economics and Accountancy Units.

The establishment of the Applied Law Unit removed academics with a law specialisation from the departments where they were previously "embedded" and relocated them in the new Applied Law Unit. The rationale for this was the previous "mismatch between the area of specialisation of the lecturer and the site of delivery" (Leach, 2012: 2). In other words, it was felt that the law lecturer needed to be located in his/her disciplinary home, rather than in a business department. It was argued that the merging of specialist academics in a unit would enable them to provide a specialised service. For example, "Law lecturers have been drawn into various departments on an arbitrary basis with insufficient regard for their qualifications, experience and areas of specialisation" (Leach, 2012:2). At a curriculum revision workshop in 2013 it was recognised that the first-year Legal Practice syllabus in OM originated in the training of legal secretaries and is therefore unique to the OM curriculum. However, the new discipline-based units were positioned, not to offer "tailor made" courses for the professional programmes, but to standardise certain first-year subjects across all diploma programmes. As a consequence, Communication, Financial Accounting, Economics, Legal Practice and Mercantile Law were standardised and converted to generic subjects; 40% of the assessment tasks were required to be "generic", that is, not programme-specific. The Financial Accounting syllabus of the Diploma in OM was "harmonised" with the accounting syllabus followed by non-accounting students in the faculty.

The curriculum revision process has attempted to offer generic law courses in the OM diploma. The Legal Practice and Mercantile Law subjects (renamed Law of Contract in the new curriculum), as an academic staff member points out, "do not have harmonised assessments with the rest of the Unit of Applied Law, mainly as they do not have the complete 24 credits of the standardised syllabi … [yet] the syllabi content is the same" (CPUT 2, 2014). Within the OM Department the assessments for these subjects are still set by the OM academics in accordance with the needs of the field of office administration.

The Financial Accounting subjects of the OM curriculum have been standardised and renamed Business Accounting. Business Accounting in OM has been "harmonised" with the accounting course for non-accounting students in departments across the faculty. The new subject is considered by an OM academic staff member to be "better organised … some of the work is easier but attention is given to the full spectrum and covers all the aspects … [so] there is work that is more advanced" (CPUT 6, 2014). Concerns were raised that the standardised Accounting curriculum may not be meeting the requirements of all the Business Faculty curricula and may be at an inappropriate level (CPUT, 2014b:12).

Of greater concern is standardisation of the first-year Communication syllabus for the entire Business Faculty. It is a generic syllabus that does not allow for the specialist requirements of the field of office management, or for the needs of OM graduates entering the workplace. For example, the OM academics have had to find opportunities outside the standardised syllabus for students to practise business-specific communication, as well as for more comprehensive assessment of, for example, business correspondence, which is an integral part of the work of office administrators. The Subject Review report, an annual report on the success rate of academic subjects, explained that a generic Communication syllabus does not enable students to engage with professional knowledge (CPUT, 2014b:12), neither does it support the provision of "epistemological access" (Morrow, 2009:1) to professional knowledge. It is also felt that the generic syllabus does not align with best practice. The recommendations of the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2013b:245) are as follows:

> There is evidence … that requirements regarding the ways readers and writers engage with texts are specific to *individual* disciplines because of rules, conventions and practices related to knowledge-making within each discipline. At the root of academic reading and writing, therefore, are a set of discipline-based principles and values related to what counts as knowledge and how that knowledge can be known.

The directive for the standardisation of subjects such as Communication, Accounting, Economics and Legal Studies within the Business Faculty is based on the premise that units

established to house these subjects will provide a "service" to the professionally or vocationally oriented programme. For example, the offering of the first year of Communication for the Marketing Department falls under the control of the Professional Communication Unit. The staff in this unit have developed a generic syllabus for Communication 1, which is intended mainly to address academic literacy needs, rather than professional communication. Although academic literacy is probably necessary, it would need to be integrated with business communication to enable students' "epistemological access" to OM knowledge.

There is the risk that strong emphasis on generic content in a standardised syllabus may neglect the possibility of specialisation, the development of professional identity, and cumulative knowledge building in the specific area of Communication, which is core to OM. It obscures the "discursive gap" (Bernstein, 2000:126), which is critical to knowledge production in fields of practice. While there may be common communication topics across different business areas, there will be different communication requirements for many business areas such as OM, Marketing and Public Relations Management. Shay and Steyn (2015:17-18 forthcoming) point out that within professional curricula "it is the demands of practice that inform the selection, sequence, pacing and evaluative rules" and that "the forms of pedagogy need to ensure the development of … professional identity".

The curriculum review process included the involvement of members from industry, graduates, students and academics. The OM curriculum should be strongly guided by principles drawn from practice, that is, from outside the institution. It would normally be considered important for an OM curriculum to depend on stronger framing between the university and sites of practice, because what is taught should relate strongly to the professional field. However, the curricular principles of the new Diploma in OM curriculum have remained under the control of the university, and particularly the faculty management, maintaining stronger relational autonomy (RA+).

6.4 Semantic gravity and semantic density: what knowledge matters in the new Office Management curriculum?

Professional curricula should provide a theoretical knowledge base, strengthening the semantic density, while simultaneously referring to the field of practice and thereby ensuring that there is appropriate semantic gravity. Professional and vocational curricula should face "inwards" towards the particular academic practices of the discipline and they should also face "outwards" towards "the occupational practices of the profession" (Shay & Steyn, 2015:

4 forthcoming). The submission to the Higher Education Qualifications Committee for the new Diploma in OM contends that this programme comprises a strong connection between theory and practice to ensure that graduates are "socially responsive" (CPUT, 2014a:7). The professional core of the new qualification will be sustained by using teaching methods such as "lectures, guest lectures, videos, case studies, role play, office simulation exercises, problem and project-based assignments, presentations, service learning and workplace learning" (CPUT, 2014a:9).

In this section, the Semantic codes of LCT are drawn on to determine the knowledge bases of the revised OM diploma. The subjects of the Diploma in OM were analysed to distinguish its stronger theoretical and conceptual components (stronger semantic density), and the stronger application and contextual components (stronger semantic gravity) in order to determine the curriculum logic.

6.4.1 Semantic gravity: knowledge acquired through practice

Semantic gravity describes the external relations of knowledge practices and "the degree to which meaning relates to its context" (Maton, 2014:129). The curriculum includes both formative and summative assessment practices; its aim is to "prepare students for employment regionally, nationally and internationally" (CPUT, 2014a:7).

Business Information Systems and Business Applications

The Business Information Systems and the Business Applications curricula include knowledge that needs to be acquired through practice. Significant amendments were made to the Business Information Systems course content. It includes the study of people and procedures, data/information, hardware, software, connectivity (the Internet and World-Wide Web), privacy, the study of the modern organisation functioning in a global environment, information systems and the modern organisation, ethics, privacy and information security, Web 2.0, social networks and electronic commerce applications, managing data and knowledge, wireless technologies, the modern organisation, and the introduction to networks which includes the study of telecommunications, networks, information systems for management and systems development (CPUT, 2014a:10,13,16).

Topics in the Business Applications subjects of the new diploma include: the application of word processing, audio processing, spreadsheets, pivot tables/charts, data management, visual presentations, publications, databases and file management, project management, SharePoint and Pastel Accounting using Pastel Accounting Version II, computer applications for

managing projects, Systems Application Programming (SAP), Enterprise Resource Planning software products (ERP), marketing information systems, production and supply chain management, and human resource processes with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) (CPUT, 2014a:10,13,16). Advanced skills in MS Excel, MS Access and MS Project, which are applications required in the workplace, ensure students are conversant with technological changes in the world of work, and are included (CPUT, 2014a:6).

The OM subjects were amended as a result of the changing office and business needs to include "updated and new features of current software applications", recommendations by the stakeholders for "vertical alignment" of the syllabi of the Diploma in OM (CPUT, 2014a:10). The requests of the Delphi participants for the inclusion in the current curriculum of content that is critical to the success of the OM graduate were taken into account. Requests included advanced Excel, Systems Application Programming (SAP), Customer Relationship Management software (CRM) and Pastel payroll, and "more up-to-date functions on technology because in industry it is updated on a regular basis" (DS2G12), as well as greater emphasis on the practical components than on the theory.

The Delphi participants' responses to the final round survey, which included additional content that had been identified as lacking in the current curriculum, are as follows: knowledge and skills of the MS Office suite received 81% consensus, comprising 82% employer, 83% graduate and 77% academic consensus. The programs and applications within the MS Office suite such as word processing, showed 74% consensus, with 76% employer, 73% graduate and 72% academic consensus. Email and the Internet obtained 68% consensus; spreadsheets, Excel, and the protection of documentation received 57% consensus of the Delphi panel. The rest of the content received less than 50% consensus of the Delphi panel (Appendix Q). Graduates commented that "it should be about being able to apply principles and identify the different types of hardware or software" (DS3G2), and that it was essential for OM graduates to "integrate computer applications, and knowledge and skills" (DS3E7). The employers at the DACUM workshop characterised the computer literacy knowledge for OM graduates as the "use of all MS Office Suite programs – MS Word, MS Excel, MS Access, MS PowerPoint, MS Publisher, and MS Outlook and [to] integrate these packages" (DACUM workshop, 2010:3).

What is interesting is the conflation of "theory" with the practical (and constantly changing) applications. Mastery of such applications would not normally be considered university-level work, although clearly important in an office environment. As these applications tend to be

taught both "theoretically" (that is, in a classroom) and "practically" (that is, in a computer laboratory), there is confusion among the academic staff with regard to their level on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. They have tended to overvalue these "business applications" in terms of credit value. In the new OM diploma, students will be assessed according to the specified outcomes and will be required to take both "theoretical" and "practical" examinations. It is assumed that there is increasing contextual complexity in the second and third year of Business Applications, where tasks and assessments are integrated according to context-specific problems of ICT practice for office administrators. The Business Applications course attempts to increase the level of complexity by the inclusion of more advanced applications and skills required, for example, SharePoint and Pastel Accounting at second-year level, and Systems Application Programming (SAP) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) at third-year level. There is an increase in complexity of practical application from first to third year, which involves engagement with increasing contextual specificity, and while the software packages are complex in nature, their application remains strongly grounded in practice, raising the semantic gravity.

The revision of the Business Information Systems and Business Applications syllabi emphasises the highly contextual nature of the work of office administrators, and the necessity for staying abreast of current software applications. Lowden et al. (2011:12) identify ICT as essential to employability. The International British Education and Examination Board (Edexcel) prepared a report on the global perspective of effective education for employment (Playfoot & Hall, 2009:50) and identified the quality valued by employers in South Africa as being that of a willingness to "embrace technology". In the South African context there is a significant gap between what graduates bring to the workplace and employers' expectations in terms of ICT skills, with the biggest gap related to the "ability to find and access information" (Griesel & Parker, 2009:11). This generic skill, like the other generic ICT skills described above, is premised on content knowledge, but is evidence of a "knowledge-blindness" descriptor (Maton, 2014:3).

It is telling that the subjects are named Business "Applications", the applications being the technologies of business communication – how business data is communicated. While these technologies are important in a modern workplace, they are applications for which content is needed. The perceived importance of the mastery of the applications makes the work of the office administrator appear routine and mechanistic. Business Applications are given more prominence than Business Communication (the first year of which has been replaced with a generic communication course).

Business Administration

The Business Administration topics cover the study of business management, the business environment, basic business calculations, the nature of management and management activities, the relevance of strategies, tactical and operational planning at different management levels, entrepreneurship, marketing, human resource management, risk management, the role of the administrative function in an organisation, planning and time management, organising in the administrative function, leading in the administrative function, controlling office activities, the virtual workplace, productivity, workflow and office procedures, and an introduction to human resource provisioning, human resource maintenance, and labour relations (CPUT, 2014a:11,13,17). While the list is extremely generic, significant amendments to the current Business Administration subject were made in response to industry input, new developments in business practices, as well as the recognition of the excessively high distribution of credits to practical subjects in the earlier OM diploma.

These amendments include an introduction to Systems Application Programming (SAP) in Business Information Systems 3, relating to human resource practices in a business. This is "horizontally aligned" with Business Administration 3 (CPUT, 2014a:16). The human resource content was included in both the current Business Administration and Personnel Management subjects. This duplication has been addressed and the human resource management component was removed from the new Workplace Psychology syllabus. The Business Administration courses include a presentation by students on business and economics, a one-week, work-based learning project, where students are placed at non-profit/non-government organisations, and an entrepreneurship portfolio. These amendments were made in response to industry representatives' call for "more practical work" (DS2E10). In their second year, students undertake a research assignment on company policies and procedures, a practical assignment on travel arrangements, and an event management project.

The Delphi respondents identified time management as lacking in the current curriculum and included it on the round one survey. Time management received 89% consensus as being critical to enhancing the employability of OM graduates, comprising 77% employer, 90% graduate and 100% academic consensus. The understanding of the importance of administration, as one of the pillars in any organisation, was added to the round one survey and showed 73% consensus, including 68% employer, 58% graduate and 93% academic consensus. These ratings show that the graduates and academics were most closely aligned with regard to the significance of time management to enhance employability of graduates. The graduates' non-alignment with the significance of administration as one of the pillars in

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any organisation may be indicative of the variety of sectors at which the Delphi graduates are employed in the field of office administration practice. Administrative procedures received 73% consensus, the control of office activities showed 57% consensus, and knowledge of company policies and procedures, 53% consensus of the Delphi participants. The rest of the Business Administration content received less than 50% consensus of the Delphi participants (see Appendix Q).

At the international institutions surveyed, Business Administration is not considered a major component of the curriculum. As one interviewee explained, "We no longer do Business Administration theory but instead, during the first year, students have one semester each of event management, quality and innovation, task and time management, and ethics" (Belgium 1, 2013). Proposals from Delphi panel members for revision to the current Business Administration course content included that "emphasis should be given to events, meetings, business planning … integrity, responsibility and ethics" (DS2G14) and "an aspect of ethical leadership and the values connected to ethical business practices and ethical relationships are important" (DS3E23). Entrepreneurship is included among the topics, which in the South African economic environment, is highly significant for the future of graduates. Moreland (2004:2) argues that students need to understand the meaning of being self-employed, and the pitfalls and sources of assistance that are available.

While the community responsibility aspect is addressed in both the first year of the Business Administration syllabus and in the second year of the Communication syllabus, where students are placed at non-profit and community organisations, applied professional ethics was not addressed in the current programme, but is included in the new subject of Diversity Management. The standardisation of the Law of Contract subject has seen the replacement of the study of labour relations with other content. As a result, the third-year Business Administration subject has had to retain the study of labour relations, which might have been better incorporated into legal studies.

Workplace Psychology
The Workplace Psychology subject content includes the study of individual behavioural differences, social behaviour and processes, and personality in the work context. The renaming of the subject is in line with the change of focus to the organisational dynamics of behaviour. The adjustments also include the level of study, which was moved from the first year to the second year (CPUT, 2014a:15). The content was considered appropriate by the Delphi participants for its centrality to office work. An item identified as lacking in the

current curriculum was the upholding of confidentiality, which received 80% consensus in the round three surveys. This included 86% employer, 80% graduate and 73% academic consensus. This was followed by dealing with individuals, which received 77% consensus, with 86% employer, 80% graduate and 64% academic consensus. Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace showed 62% consensus, and the understanding of organisational culture was also considered lacking from the current qualification and received 61% consensus. This was followed by 54% consensus for stress management and 52% consensus for personal relationships at work. Knowledge of labour laws and disciplinary procedures, which was lacking from the current syllabus, received 50% consensus from the Delphi participants in the final round survey. The remaining items of the Workplace Psychology syllabus received less than 50% consensus from the Delphi respondents (Appendix Q).

Delphi panel members suggested that additional items which needed to be added to the round one survey were those requiring the "monitoring of students' growth and development" (DS2A10), "performance management beyond human resource control" (DS2E4), the need for "drafting of job descriptions" (DS3E1) and for "personal development and performance appraisals" (DS3E18). These components require knower qualities and dispositions that are required for the development of the professional identity of office administrators. An employer commented that, "being aware of how to deal with other people … can only be developed through practice" (DS3E16). However, the new subject does not incorporate all these suggestions but focuses instead on human development, learning, perception, cognition, motivation, emotion, personality, attitudes and values, aggression and conflict, group behavior, and other social processes in organisations. The OM graduates who participated in the curriculum workshop reported that the current syllabus was useful for "getting to know and understand personality traits and behaviour differences [and] will assist with proper management of staff in any work situation" (Curriculum workshop, 2011:5). However, the emphasis in the new syllabus does not focus on the management of staff but on a generic approach to social behaviour and processes, assigning the human resource knowledge of labour law and disciplinary procedures to the Business Administration syllabi.

Diversity Management
In accordance with the vision and mission of the institution and the Business Faculty, a new syllabus, Diversity Management, has been incorporated into the second year of study "to prepare students for a diverse and multicultural workplace" (CPUT, 2014a:7). It includes the study of diversity, the value of diversity, diversity management, the individual and society, identities and self-empowerment, the impact of apartheid, values, ethics and attitudes of the

workforce, bias and prejudice, power, influence and authority, government policies, leadership, morals and ethics (CPUT, 2014a:16). Since this is a new subject, there is no data from Delphi participants, documentary data or interview data on the significance of this content for the office manager. However, an employer on the Delphi panel was concerned that ethical leadership and ethical business practices were absent from the current curriculum. This is of significance for the new curriculum, and there has been a drive to include professional ethics in response to the issues confronting professionals in the workplace (Collste, 2012:27), including the development of professional codes and rules of behaviour within a community of professionals. The inclusion of this content would appear to support the development of the professional identity of the office administrator entering the field of practice. As this subject has not yet been implemented, it is not possible to judge its appropriateness.

OM Practical

The OM Practical comprises 60 credits (or ±16% or the total course value); this is the component of the curriculum when students undergo six months' internship in the workplace. The internal committee of the CPUT for the recurriculation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework aligned qualification recommended the amendment of this syllabus. The new syllabus aims to assist students to develop and expand on their marketable skills, to develop a greater understanding of work ethics and cultures, including people in the workplace, to enhance abilities to interact with colleagues and clients, and to integrate classroom learning with workplace experience (CPUT, 2014a:18). The rationale for the syllabus is that the "educational process takes on greater meaning as [the student] is exposed to the practical implications of the theoretical knowledge; and helps him/her to develop a positive self-image" (CPUT, 2014a:19). At the end of the six-month internship, the employer will be required to provide feedback and students will be required to make a presentation and present a portfolio of their experiences in the workplace.

This practical syllabus is recognised as significant to the employability of the graduates. Research shows that employers, students and graduates recognised that internships, work placement and vacation work were effective in enhancing graduate employability and that the duration of the experience of at least six months was considered necessary for students and employers to obtain the full benefits (Lowden et al., 2011:vi). This syllabus focuses on the implementation component of the curriculum and the semantic gravity is strengthened. Thus, exposure to the workplace context and problems of increasing contextual complexity call

"forth more specialized disciplinary knowledge and cultivated gaze" to solve these situated problems (Shay & Steyn, 2015:16 forthcoming).

6.4.2 Semantic Density in Diploma: Office Management

Semantic density describes "the degree of condensation of meaning within socio-cultural practices" (Maton, 2014:129). Generally in secretarial training, recommendations have been made for a curriculum that recognises the need for word processing, business writing, office data systems ... communication systems, accounting and management skills (Hennebach, 1989:45). More recent research shows that clerical work was deskilled and made mechanistic and labelled as "women's work". The previously prestigious role of the secretary was disaggregated into the "head" work of male managers and the "hand" work of female clerical workers (Solberg, 2014:1). Clerical work has not received much attention as an area of research. However, current theories of writing, rhetoric and literacy understand secretarial work to be "situated, material and distributed – and worthy of study" (Solberg, 2014:15).

Lea and Stierer (2000:33) argue that writing in a professional context can be regarded as "a contextualised social practice linked to the subject discipline of study". From this viewpoint, writing practices are an essential part of the content of the curriculum and professional objectives of "business-based undergraduate qualifications such as public relations" (Tench, 2003:438). In the same way, writing practices should constitute a fundamental part of the qualification of the new Diploma in OM. A focus on the core knowledge area of communication would strengthen the semantic density of the curriculum and support cumulative knowledge building.

Communication

The first year Communication syllabus is an introduction to communication theory and communication practice in the business world consisting of verbal and non-verbal communication, intercultural communication, small group communication, listening and oral communication theory, oral presentations, reading practices and summary writing, plagiarism and referencing, business correspondence comprising layout, content, tone, register, and style, letter writing and concise correspondence. The syllabus also includes report writing, organisational communication, group dynamics and conflict resolution, meeting theory and meeting correspondence. Assessments include essay writing, assignments, oral presentations and summative tests.

The second-year syllabus covers reading, comprehension and critical thinking skills, business correspondence, meeting correspondence, oral communication and presentations, and professional self-development comprising a SWOT analysis and portfolio of development. The syllabus also includes a study of organisational communication, team and small group communication, multicultural communication within organisations, report and proposal writing, job application and interview skills. The course content is applied in simulated work conditions, and the application of what has been learned in case studies and workplace scenarios. The course includes work-related assignments and, during the second year, a one-week visit to a workplace where students are placed at non-profit organisations and offer administrative services to the community (CPUT, 2014a:15). The theoretical and conceptual knowledge provided in the Communication course includes essay-writing practices, oral presentations and simulations of content in subjects across the curriculum.

The Delphi panel members identified the need for a range of communication skills: correct written language, the necessity of understanding the English language and its application, and documentation etiquette, as lacking in the current diploma. Correct written language received 77% consensus, with 68% employer, 91% graduate and 73% academic consensus. The understanding of English language and its application showed 71% consensus, including 62% employer, 91% graduate and 60% academic consensus. Documentation etiquette obtained 71% consensus, with 63% employer, 83% graduate and 66% academic consensus. These findings show the value assigned by the panel to these additional skills. The graduate consensus was significantly higher than that of the employer and academic consensus, showing the value assigned by graduates in the workplace to language knowledge and skills. Team work and small groups received 70% consensus, listening skills and conflict resolution 64% consensus, oral communication and presentation skills 63% consensus, control of one's emotions 52% consensus, and goals and objectives 50% consensus. The rest of the content received less than 50% consensus (Appendix Q). The application and implementation of these components of the subject are implicit in the current qualification, but there is a need for additional opportunities to practise with a view to mastering these skills. Professional communication knowledge and values integrated into the course work need to be applied in written and oral exercises and simulations.

The UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey, 2013 (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2014:31) found an increase in skill-shortage vacancies as a result of a lack of communication skills, particularly oral communication, as well as a lack of literacy skills. Opportunities for deliberate practice, feedback on performance and for the improvement of

performance, are necessary for the development of expertise in oral presentation and writing practices, especially in the context of a "professionally relevant task domain" (Kellogg, 2008:18). For example, the Delphi participants' comments were that the communication subjects should include "proficiency in at least two official languages" (DS2E1), "more presentation skills" (DS3E18), and that "communication skills are important and simulations of these skills will be useful during the third year" (DS3G14). An employer commented that "communication knowledge and skills are particularly necessary among second- and third-language English speakers, working in a predominantly English environment" (DS2E23).

There is a concern that the standardised first-year syllabus will hinder the students' access to the professional disciplinary knowledge required for the field of practice. However, the syllabus offers the opportunity for the OM academics to contextualise communication knowledge in the field of practice of office administrators. Language studies and communication are major components of most international programmes offering the same or similar curricula (Chapter 5) and necessary for the development of the professional identity of the office administrator. The reduction in the distribution of credits from 20 to 18 credits for each year of study is limited in comparison with other areas of study, such as Business Information Systems and Business Administration, and is inappropriate for the development of a strong language core for the curriculum.

What might be necessary is a stronger grounding in the rhetorical and discursive practices of business communication and an understanding of its genres. A survey of the *Journal of Business Communication* provides an indication of what a strong communication course might look like. There are articles on the genre of the monthly or quarterly commentary document in which managers of investment funds report on their funds to investors, providing insights about this genre by examining its conventions (Bruce, 2014: 315), and analysing the influence of instant text messaging as a medium of communication on the content communicated (Darics, 2014:338). More sophisticated understandings of business communication, such as the ability to perform a discourse analysis of documents, or a strong grounding in genre theory, would constitute powerful knowledge, and enable office administrators to reclaim the status of the company secretary, whose understanding of documents might exceed those of their managers.

Business Accounting

The aim of the new Business Accounting syllabus is to enable students to understand and perform day-to-day office duties. This includes the recording of subsidiary books, calculation

of VAT, ledger accounts, bank reconciliation statements, stock records, an elementary level of profit calculations, as well as the recording of cash budgets. Petty cash and wages journal are included in the syllabus in response to feedback from the stakeholders. These aspects are a component of the current first-year Business Administration syllabus, but were revised in accordance with changes in business practice and horizontal alignment (or standardisation initiatives) (CPUT, 2014a:13).

Business Accounting includes amendments that were made to ensure that the theory is integrated with the practical. The sequencing of the subject has moved from the second to the first year to prepare students for the practical component of Pastel Accounting (a software accounting program) in the second year subject, Business Applications (CPUT, 2014a:5). Business Accounting includes simulated and supervised practice of all the accounting principles and content. The Delphi panel's assessment of the syllabus content is as follows: budgets and budgetary control received 60% consensus for budgets and budgetary control, comprising 46% employer, 50% graduate and 83% academic consensus. Knowledge of how to read a balance sheet and profit and loss accounts was added to the round one survey by the Delphi participants, and showed 56% consensus, with 18% employer, 67% graduate and 83% academic consensus. These findings show the significantly lower percentage of employers' rating of the content critical to the core work of the graduate in the workplace. The rest of the content of the syllabus received less than 50% consensus from the Delphi participants (Appendix Q).

Many of the functions of financial accounting are not considered to be core to the work of the office administrator. An employer commented that "we outsource the accounting functions" (DS2E1). According to the DACUM workshop members, an administrative assistant should be able to use basic accounting skills (DACUM workshop, 2010:5). This raises the question of the appropriateness of the syllabus. The standardised content is appropriate for the depth of knowledge and skills required for the field of practice, but it could possibly be offered over a semester or as an elective. Delphi respondents advocated that "it is better if Financial Accounting is taught in the third year for a semester" (DS2A2), and "Accounting could be a complete choice from first year straight through to the third year" (DS3G12). Similar subjects are offered at the institutions in the countries benchmarked, in most instances as an introduction to accounting/financial/business accounting/economics for at least a semester or as an elective for further study (Chapter 5). Lowden et al. (2011:12) recognise that employers "value numeracy relevant to the post". The findings show that, while Business Accounting knowledge and skills might be necessary for the employability of the graduates, many

organisations have specialists who are responsible for these functions. Those graduates who find employment requiring these skills will have the basic financial knowledge and skills and can undertake further studies if required.

Legal Practice and Law of Contract

The Legal Practice syllabus aims to "provide learners with a broader understanding of general principles of law in the Republic of South Africa, particularly those relevant to office managers" (CPUT, 2014a:12). The Law of Contract syllabus (Mercantile Law in the current curriculum) aims to ensure that students "acquire knowledge, skills and competence in the law of contract and are able to practically apply this knowledge to problems and hypothetical cases" (CPUT, 2014a:18). The Legal Practice syllabus consists of an introduction to the structure and jurisdiction of South African courts, basic civil procedure in the magistrate courts with reference to high court procedures, debt collection procedures, and divorce procedures (CPUT, 2014a:12). The Law of Contract syllabus includes a study of the fundamental principles of the law of contract and incorporates the essential requirements for the formation of a valid contract and for students to acquire competence in the Contract of Sale. The level 5 (or first year) syllabus of the Law of Contract is offered during the third year, as students are required to acquire the foundational knowledge of legal concepts offered in the Legal Practice subject during the first year of study. The name and credit allocation have been revised to align with the harmonised standard of the Unit for Law within the Business Faculty at CPUT, and some content has been changed as a result of changes in law practices (CPUT, 2014a:12).

The Delphi respondents' assessment of the content of the current syllabi comprised the inclusion of the knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment to the round one survey. The knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment received 68% consensus, including 50% employer, 78% graduate and 75% academic consensus. Labour law received 48% consensus, with 75% employer, 44% graduate and 25% academic consensus. The rest of the content of the current Legal Practice and Mercantile Law syllabi received lower than 50% consensus regarding their criticality to the fostering of the employability of the graduate (Appendix Q). The employers attending the DACUM workshop felt that administrative assistants should be able to understand and interpret their employment contracts and know their legal and other rights and responsibilities (DACUM workshop, 2010:1). It is evident that the employers on the Delphi panel place a high value on the knowledge of labour law, but this has been removed from the revised standardised Law of Contract subject. Instead a component of labour law in the form of

labour relations will be included in the third year of the Business Administration syllabus. The third-year students and alumni comments were that "it is difficult to apply for positions in the law sector as they only require people who had further legal qualifications" (AS1), and "least useful syllabus" (AS14). The emphasis on the stronger theoretical and conceptual components of the subject weakens the semantic gravity and strengthens the semantic density of the subject, but it is not relevant to the field of practice of the office administrator.

There is a the risk that the emphasis on generic content, particularly in the Law of Contract syllabus, will prevent the possibility of specialisation or cumulative knowledge building and the establishment of professional identity in the field of practice for office administrators. Labour relations focusing on interpreting and contextualising prevailing principles of labour relations in South Africa should be accommodated in the first-year Legal Practice syllabus. The international institutions studied offer a semester or more of Civil, Enterprise or Business Law (Chapter 5). Thus, a semester or two of relevant legal studies relating to entrepreneurship rights, labour relations and workplace employment contracts would benefit the graduate entering the workplace and be appropriate knowledge for the field of practice.

6.4.3 Reflections on the semantic wave in the Diploma: Office Management curriculum
Muller (2009:214) describes the new professions as those that include fields such as business studies, tourism and information science. These differ from the older traditional professions and may develop a relatively weak professional identity compared with those of the older professions. Professionally oriented syllabi draw on applied disciplinary knowledge curricula. This is knowledge which has been "recontextualised for application in the field of practice, and then again recontextualised for curriculum" (Wheelahan, 2010:157).

An attempt was made (without having access to the assessment tasks of the new Diploma in OM curriculum as it has not yet been implemented) to calculate the possible distribution of credits to the stronger application and contextual components, and the stronger theoretical and conceptual components of the curriculum. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the relative strengths of semantic gravity and semantic density of the recurriculated curriculum. A semantic wave was used to map the movement between theory-based and conceptual and practice-based and contextual components of the programme. To highlight the stronger semantic density and the stronger semantic density components of the curriculum, the outcomes of the individual subjects were analysed to determine the distribution of credits of the individual syllabi over the period of three years. Table 6.2 shows the distribution of credit value ascribed to the syllabi of the new Diploma: OM.

Table 6.2: Credit distribution – Diploma: Office Management

Subjects/Levels	South African Qualifications Authority Credits	Semantic gravity ± percentages *		Semantic density ± percentages *	
YEAR 1 (NQF LEVEL 5)			%		%
Business Information Systems 1	18	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Business Applications 1	24	SG+SD-	100	SG+SD-	0
Business Administration 1	24	SG+SD-	60	SG+SD-	40
Communication 1	18	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Business Accounting	18	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Legal Practice	18	SG-SD+	30	SG-SD+	70
YEAR 2 (NQF LEVEL 6)					
Business Information Systems 2	24	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Business Applications 2	24	SG+SD-	100	SG+SD-	0
Business Administration 2	24	SG+SD-	60	SG+SD-	40
Communication 2	18	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Workplace Psychology	12	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
Diversity Management	12	SG+SD-	70	SG+SD-	30
YEAR 3 (NQF LEVEL 6)					
Business Information Systems 3	18	SG+SD+	50	SG+SD+	50
Business Applications 3	18	SG+SD-	100	SG+SD-	0
Business Administration 3	18	SG+SD-	60	SG+SD-	40
Law of Contract	18	SG-SD+	30	SG-SD+	70
OM Practice	60	SG+SD-	100	SG+SD-	0
TOTAL CREDITS	366				

* These values are approximate percentages as in Table 4.3.

The stronger theory-based and conceptual components and the stronger practice-based and contextual components of the curriculum were mapped out over six semesters (Figure 6.1) to produce a semantic wave. The black line refers to the stronger theoretical and conceptual components of the syllabi and thus to stronger semantic density. The grey line refers to the stronger practical and contextual components of the syllabi and thus to stronger semantic gravity.
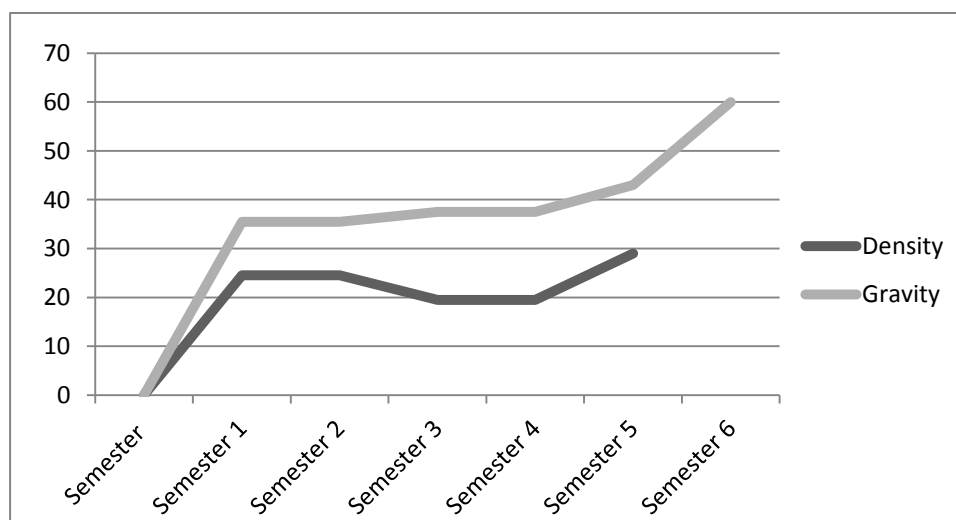
Figure 6.1: Semantic wave of credit distribution over six semesters

The semantic wave shows a higher level of the distribution of credits to the practical and contextual components of the curriculum over the period of three years. The new Diploma: OM programme has stronger semantic gravity, underpinned by a weaker component of semantic density (SG+SD-). There is a steady rise in the application and contextual components for semesters one to six, but a drop in the theoretical and conceptual components in semesters three and four. This is the result of Legal Practice comprising stronger theoretical and conceptual components in the first year of study and Workplace Psychology and Diversity Management being offered in the second year of study, which has predominantly application and contextual components. In the fifth semester students only have six months of classes prior to the commencement of the internship in semester six. There is a large increase in the distribution of credits to the implementation and contextual elements in the sixth semester as a result of the distribution of 60 credits to the OM Practical syllabus when students undertake six months' work placement. What the semantic waves do not show are the misalignment between the academic subjects and the field of office management.

In the next section the analysis of the Diploma: OM curriculum drawing on the Specialisation code is discussed. The purpose of this analysis is to determine the attributes necessary for the role of office administrator and the ideal graduate for the field of practice of office administration.

6.5 The ideal office manager, according to the new Diploma in Office Management

Specialisation is based on the "simple premise that practices and beliefs are about or oriented towards something and by someone" (Maton, 2014:29). The "practices and beliefs" implied by the new Diploma in OM can thus be understood to be "about or oriented towards something and by someone". In this section, the epistemic relations (ER) and social relations (SR), which describe the ideal office manager, at least according to the new Diploma in OM, are discussed.

The Diploma in OM encompasses predominantly knower code characteristics, that is, the attributes of the knower are emphasised as the basis of legitimisation (Maton, 2014:30). The knower code has weaker epistemic relations (ER-) and stronger social relations (SR+) (see Figure 2.3). The literature shows that office administrators and secretaries are required to do much more than the administrative work or office management in organisations. For example, the role of administrators and secretaries in the medical field requires interpersonal skills to deal with patients and basic diagnostic skills to ensure patient cases are given priority (Holten-Møller & Vikkelsø, 2012:38). Those in administrative assistant positions are

expected to value confidentiality, tact and caring, as they are often required to carry out the personal work of their managers (Truss et al., 2013:356). The nature of the work of office administrators and office managers is varied and one of service to others, which makes the development of a curriculum for office administrators difficult, as it is related to supporting the work of others (Waymark, 1997:112).

6.5.1 What kind of a knower is the office manager?

The Delphi panel members rated the following critical skills of the round three surveys (Appendix Q) as follows: the ability to organise and manage oneself and one's activities effectively received 91% consensus, comprising 90% employer, 91% graduate and 92% academic consensus. The critical skill to work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation or community obtained 75% consensus, including 79% employer, 75% graduate and 71% academic consensus. These ratings show an alignment in consensus of the Delphi panel members. The Delphi panel members added the skill of multi-tasking to the round one survey, which showed 68% consensus, comprising 63% employer, 83% graduate and 57% academic consensus. Self-motivation received 68% consensus, including 63% employer, 75% graduate and 65% academic consensus. The skill of being able to work under stress received 67% consensus, including 53% employer, 92% graduate and 57% academic consensus. These ratings show that the graduates' consensus ratings were not aligned with those of the employers and academics. Communicating effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation, received 66% consensus. To collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information as well as life skills, behaviour and attitudes received 56% consensus. Being able to embrace diversity in the workplace received 53% consensus and the ability to be compatible with company ethics received 51% consensus. The rest of the items received less than 50% consensus from the Delphi panel.

The Delphi participants rated the personal attributes central to the role of office administrators as follows: having honesty and integrity received 88% consensus, including 79% employer, 100% graduate and 86% academic consensus. The attribute of being reliable obtained 82% consensus, with 74% employer, 100% graduate and 72% academic consensus. Being loyal and committed received 74% consensus, including 74% employer, 92% graduate and 57% academic consensus. While the employers considered these personal attributes significant to the employability of the graduates, it is evident that the graduates in the workplace rated these attributes as vital to fostering work readiness in the field of office administrative practice. The attribute of using your own intuition and thinking and working on your own, which was

added to the round one survey by the Delphi members, received 74% consensus, comprising 68% employer, 67% graduate and 86% academic consensus. The attribute of punctuality was added to the original list of personal attributes and showed 68% consensus, including 68% employer, 58% graduate and 79% academic consensus.

These ratings show the significance of these personal attributes to the academics, and the non-alignment of the graduates' perceptions with those of the employers and academics regarding the importance of punctuality. The personal attribute of being motivated received 63% consensus and being adaptable 61% consensus of the Delphi panel. The attributes of possessing common sense, having self-confidence, dealing with pressure, "going the extra mile" and doing more than what is expected, having a positive attitude, possessing a positive self-esteem, and applying knowledge to new situations, received consensus in the 50% to 59% range. The rest of the personal attributes received less than 50% consensus of the Delphi participants (Appendix Q).

The above skills and personal attributes were recognised as central to the work of office administrators and office managers. The ideal graduate of the Diploma in OM curriculum should acquire the attributes of honesty, integrity, loyalty, commitment, independence, punctuality, self-motivation, flexibility, common sense, self-confidence, a positive attitude, and self-esteem, and should be able to apply knowledge to new situations. Graduates should be able to organise and manage themselves, work effectively with others in a team, be able to multi-task, work under pressure, communicate effectively, and be able to collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information, embrace diversity in the workplace, and be compatible with company ethics. These are all generic attributes that would be desirable in almost any profession. Almost all the participants had difficulty in identifying the foundational knowledge bases that would develop these skills and attributes.

A graduate commented that "OM has laid a good foundation in my career and personal development … and I have the right attitude and always do more than what is expected of me" (DS2G3). The UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2009:6) identified the specific knowledge and skills that a particular workplace will require as including

> … self-management, punctuality and time management, fitting dress and behaviour to context, overcoming challenges and asking for help when necessary, thinking and solving problems, creativity, reflecting on and learning from own actions, prioritising, analysing situations, and developing solutions.

These descriptors are so generic that they would apply to almost any graduate in any workplace.

While employers expect graduates to have disciplinary knowledge, they do not seem to be able to specify what this knowledge is. The broader skills and attributes that are described are not specific to the work of office managers. Higher Education South Africa is aware of the employers' concerns that graduates should have the ability to solve problems, innovate and perform in constantly changing workplaces (Griesel & Parker, 2009:5), but problem solving and innovation are based on a knowledge base. One cannot "problem solve" without a problem. The nature of the problems to be addressed by office managers is an area missing in the responses of participants and in the curriculum itself. The Higher Education South Africa report concedes, "it is to be expected that the nature of "graduateness" is also in the process of changing in relation to an increasingly knowledge-driven world" (Griesel & Parker, 2009: 5). But what is the knowledge that drives the world of office management?

6.5.2 What knowledge does the office manager need?

Disciplines or fields that emphasise the possession of specialist knowledge have stronger epistemic relations (ER+) and weaker social relations (SR-) (Maton, 2014:30). The Diploma in OM emphasises the knower, that is, the epistemic relations are weaker (ER-) and the social relations are stronger (SR+). It is because of the weakness of the epistemic relations that the knowledge base of OM has become obscured. Each of the subjects of the Diploma in OM curriculum hints at a knowledge base, but the subjects usually considered to have stronger epistemic relations, such as Business Accounting and Business Information Systems and Business Applications, are not taken to a sufficiently high level to identify these areas as the epistemic base of the qualification. Legal Practice and Law of Contract similarly hint at knowledge areas, but are misaligned with the field of practice of office administration. The blind spot for the research participants (with some exceptions) and the curriculum designers is communication, in particular the specialist area of Business Communication.

6.6 Conclusion

The findings show that there has been a shift in the control over the design of the new curriculum which is no longer in the hands of the academic staff. It is now in the hands of the management of the Faculty of Business, particularly the faculty directives for the "standardisation" of certain subjects. This has maintained the stronger positional autonomy of managers (PA+) whilst that of the academics is weakened. Stronger relational autonomy RA+ has also been maintained, with the development of the new Diploma in OM curriculum

remaining under the control of the university. There has, however, been a shift towards the strategic objectives and curricular principles of the faculty management, rather than those of the academic staff.

The Diploma in OM falls within the category of professional programmes comprising hybrid knowledge bases which unlike, for example, engineering, have distinct requirements for the selection of content and sequencing. Powerful knowledge in the field of OM is derived from applied language studies, applied linguistics, and business and technical communication, although this is not acknowledged in the new diploma. Hordern (2014:388) describes pressure within management studies to "verticalise" knowledge into a "structure that replicates perceptions of the discipline of economics" in order to enhance "the professionalism of management research". He points out that this overlooks the intrinsically social character of management activity. Similar pressures exist within OM studies, where attempts are being made to "verticalise" knowledge by incorporating two law subjects in the curriculum, while ignoring the intrinsic character of the work of office administrators as business communicators, facilitators and service providers. These are attempts to develop a stronger semantic density knowledge base for the programme but incorporating two years of legal studies is not powerful knowledge for this field of practice.

The emphasis on the technical requirements and the stronger semantic gravity knowledge base for the field of practice of office administration may undermine the disciplinary core of the curriculum needed for cumulative knowledge building. The establishment of a strong disciplinary core in the form of communication theory and practice would provide a solid foundation for the role of the office administrator and office manager. The data shows that the Delphi panel members regarded communication practice, including correct written language, and the understanding of English language and its application, as critical to the success of the graduate. This is in line with the growing importance of writing and communication as the foundation of clerical and administrative knowledge (Solberg, 2014:17).

The new Diploma in OM has primarily "knower" characteristics with weaker epistemic relations (ER-) and stronger social relations (SR+). OM work in support of others has an intrinsically social character.

In the next chapter the summary of the findings and the conclusions of the analysis of the current, international, and new OM curricula are discussed. The research questions are addressed and the framework of the ideal disciplinary base for the OM curricula is described.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH

> Higher Education the world over is responding – sometimes rapidly, sometimes glacially – to changes in the growing specialization and complexity of knowledge and knowledge work that demand greater rhetorical flexibility, the capacity to create knowledge in new and often interdisciplinary ways, and the ability to reshape and repurpose knowledge in complex environments. These demands, combined with pressures for social equity, mean that higher education can no longer afford to simply skim the cream, to reproduce a stable elite in each discipline. Students – all students – must learn to communicate in complex ways to become effective professionals and, indeed, citizens (Russell, 2007:270).

Drawing on the findings of the analysis of the current OM curriculum (Chapter 4), the international curricula similar to the current OM curriculum (Chapter 5) and the new curriculum (Chapter 6), this chapter provides a summary and conclusions of the research findings, and addresses the research questions. The chapter concludes with the objectives of the training provided in South Africa for secretaries, office administrators and office managers, and the development of a framework for the ideal disciplinary base for the OM curriculum.

7.1 Summary of research findings

This study of the current and new OM curricula uncovered a neglected field of practice and its traditional knowledge bases. The process of uncovering the field traced the history of secretarial work to its origins in early Egypt and ancient Rome, when scribes and notaries were entrusted with secrets, and private and confidential information (Garfield, 1986:112). The gendered nature of the work was also uncovered; prior to the 1860s, clerical work was done by male clerks who were expected to learn the business and become its manager or owner someday (Davies, 1982:9). With the expansion of business in the late 19th century, and increases in paperwork and office mechanisation, female clerks and typists were employed. The rationalisation was that women could operate typewriters better than men because they supposedly were more dexterous (Davies, 1982:55). In the US more woman were graduating from high school than men (Davies, 1982:56), thus the reality was that it was women's greater literacy levels, combined with the fact that they were willing to work for lower wages (Garfield, 1986:113), that made them ideal secretaries.

Early training was haphazard and the work of secretaries regarded as unskilled and routine. This field of practice was considered highly feminised, with limited career prospects, owing to the mechanical and routine nature of the work. These stereotypical perceptions influenced the development of curricula intended for the training of secretaries that have served to

dismiss or undervalue women's intellectual and literate labour. Over time, the work of secretaries and administrative clerks was recognised to be much more than routine mechanical work, and the late 20th century saw the inclusion of business writing, communication, word processing, office data systems, accounting, and management skills in the training of secretaries (Hennebach, 1989:46). Current thinking has moved towards a re-evaluation of secretarial and administrative work as one that includes many varied roles and levels of work, but all opinions emphasise literate practices, communication, and information management (Solberg, 2014:3). The study focused on the knowledge bases of the current and new diplomas in OM curricula, how these were arrived at, and their influence on enhancing the employability of graduates, who remain largely women.

This thesis argues that employability is about the development of critical, reflective graduates who are empowered to contribute to their future places of employment in order to retain employment and promotion prospects in an ever-changing competitive global society. The study raises important questions about the role of higher education in professional and vocational programmes. The role of higher education in such programmes should not be about skills-based training for the purpose of finding employment. Rather, it is about the development of professionals who possess specialised expertise in a field of knowledge, and the skills and the personal attributes that are contextualised in the field of practice, in order for them to cope with the requirements of an unknown future. The thesis supports the view that the purpose of vocational education "is to induct students into a field of practice and the theoretical knowledge that underpins practice as the basis for integrating and synthesising each" (Wheelahan, 2010:4).

"Knowledge itself needs to be taken seriously" and therefore requires "the right conceptual tools for analysing this object of study" (Maton, 2014:14). The use of LCT, which was developed as a conceptual framework for the investigation of knowledge and education, and which is allied to social realism, laid the foundations for overcoming and identifying evidence of "knowledge blindness" in the OM curricula (Maton, 2014:8). Maton (2014:9) argues, "In identifying errors and blind spots in educational thinking, social realism argues for a stronger theory of knowledge." The identification of the blind spots of the curriculum designers of the OM curricula has laid a stronger foundation of knowledge by exploring the organising principles of different knowledge forms, and the implications for knowledge building and student achievement (Maton, 2014:10).

7.2 Conclusions of findings

In the sections that follow the conclusions drawn from the findings of this research project and the research questions are addressed. The recommendations for the development of a sound disciplinary core for the OM curriculum, and the contributions of this research project, are discussed.

7.2.1 Positional and relational autonomy in the Office Management curricula

In this section conclusions are drawn with regard to the decision-making processes for curricular selection in the current and new Diploma in OM, and the institutional discourses that regulate, enable or constrain curricular selection. The Autonomy dimension of LCT was drawn on to analyse the institutional and higher education policies, processes and directives that determined the development of the current and new Diploma in OM curricula.

7.2.1.1 Current and new curricula: positional autonomy

The analysis of the current curriculum, from its earlier history in the technikon system, showed that, in the absence of strong representation from the profession, academics were able to assume control of the curriculum.

Recent higher education policies, such as the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (DoE, 2007:5) and the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (SAQA, 2013:6) have further strengthened the autonomy of universities of technology, giving them degree-awarding status; this, together with the lack of strong professional bodies in the field, has additionally enabled the OM curriculum to remain under the control of the universities and not under the control of the practitioners. This has maintained the stronger positional autonomy (PA+) of the academic institution. Thus it can be concluded that the curriculum of the Diploma in OM is largely controlled by academics, who have recontextualised the needs of the field through an academic "gaze".

However, in the process of revising the current OM curriculum towards the inception of the new Diploma in OM, there has been an important shift. The control of the current curriculum was in the hands of the academic department and its academic staff; the control over the design of the new curriculum is in the hands of the Faculty of Business management, in particular the faculty directives for "standardisation". Standardisation has predominately impacted on the core knowledge area of OM, namely that of communication. Thus, maintaining the stronger positional autonomy of managers (PA+) and that of academics is weakening. An effect of this is the creation of tensions in positional autonomy.

7.2.1.2 Current and new Diploma in Office Management curricula: relational autonomy

The current Diploma in OM is a practical programme that serves the needs of office management in developing economies; thus it would be sensible to assume that the employers and practitioners would contribute strongly to curricular decision making. However, the lack of official representative bodies or councils for secretaries or office managers means that the field of OM is widely dispersed and not formalised. For example, there is no professional council or similar body to regulate practice or advise on education and training. This has resulted in the stronger relational autonomy (RA+) of the academic institution. Curricular principles informing the OM diploma might be derived from the field of practice, but have been recontextualised from the point of view of the academics, that is, from inside the institution, and not from the profession.

The process of revision towards the new OM curriculum involved members from industry, graduates, students and academics. As teachers on a practical programme, most academics felt that the curriculum should be strongly guided by principles drawn from practice, from outside of "academia". The curriculum review process thus included the involvement of members from industry, academics, graduates and students. However, the lack of external structures to support strong professional involvement meant that the development of the new Diploma in OM curriculum remained under the control of the university, but with a shift towards the curricular principles, strategic objectives and cost-saving directives of the faculty management, rather than those of the academic staff who teach on the programme. There has thus been further recontextualisation and maintenance of stronger relational autonomy RA+.

7.2.2 Semantic gravity and semantic density: what knowledge matters in the Office Management curricula?

In this section, conclusions are drawn with regard to the nature of the knowledge bases of the Diploma in OM with reference to the findings from the analysis of the theoretical and conceptual components, and practical and contextual components of the current and new OM curricula, as well as comparison with the international curricula. The conclusions are framed within the Semantic dimension of LCT.

7.2.2.1 Semantic gravity of Office Management curricula

The current OM curriculum is a largely practical programme that emphasises the deeply contextual nature of the work of office administrators. In this sense it could be described as a "generic" curriculum. It is a programme that has a stronger semantic gravity (SG+) or stronger application and contextual component, and has a weaker semantic density, or weaker

theoretical and conceptual component (SD-). As such it focuses on the occupational practices of the office management profession. The importance of the practical component is emphasised by the work-based learning element of the curriculum in which students are required to undertake six months of internship. This component of the curriculum further strengthens its semantic gravity.

Information Administration skills were seen by the academic staff as being important for enhancing the employability of office administrators, and for steering the programme towards meeting the demands of the workplace. The curriculum revision process therefore provided the opportunity for the updating of the technology and software requirements in response to the demands of the employers and practitioners in the field of practice. The field of information technology is constantly changing, and an emphasis on the "technology", without an emphasis on the communication knowledge principles that underpin this technology, gives evidence of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3) in the curriculum. This refers to the early days of the development of the curriculum when the emphasis was on "shorthand" and not on the literacy skills of secretaries.

The new OM curriculum was analysed as a programme that is stronger in semantic gravity (SG+) and weaker in semantic density (SD-). Focus was placed on the Business Information Systems and Business Applications subjects; the new curriculum also included a six-month internship. The revision of the subject areas of the new curriculum reveals the highly contextual nature of office management work. It is a programme that needs to address the changing office technology environment; however, as this environment is undergoing constant change, there is a clear need to focus on its basis, rather than on constantly re-learning new applications. The study of the curriculum semantics showed the increase in the complexity of the practical applications from first to third year, involving engagement with increasing contextuality. The programme's emphasis on application is strongly grounded in practices that raise the semantic gravity.

The new curriculum addressed many of the needs of the employers and practitioners who were involved with the revision process, but in so doing over-emphasised the computer applications component of the programme. The new curriculum thus has a focus on the mechanics of communication, that is, "computer technology" and not communication as a knowledge field itself. This emphasis on the technical requirements shows that there is clear evidence of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3) amongst employers and practitioners in the field of practice of office management that may weaken the disciplinary core of the

programme, which is essential for cumulative knowledge building. It is not surprising that practitioners are "knowledge blind" in the light of the dispersed variety and nature of office management and its different levels. These have not been codified in the way that other professions have established levels of practice and identified the knowledge areas that are a foundation to these areas and levels of practice. The essential disciplinary knowledge base of communication studies was not ignored by practitioners, but the immediate workplace demands for "computer technology" knowledge and skills were given greater priority. The workplace of the future will have different computer technology and applications for which universities of technology may not be able to prepare graduates adequately. However, a solid disciplinary core of communication theory and knowledge of business communication genres and technical communication will provide the basis for the transfer of knowledge to enable graduates to meet the future demands of their workplaces.

Semantic gravity and the international curricula
Internationally, it was seen that semantic gravity and semantic density are in a less "generic" and more "professional" area. KaHo Sint-Lieven University College has both stronger practical and contextual and theoretical and conceptual components of their programme and therefore has stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+). The stronger practical and contextual component was evident in the emphasis on the study of information and communication technologies, Sales, Marketing, Human Resource Management, and Entrepreneurship, with practical and work-based projects at each level, as well as a six- month internship.

The Polytechnic Institute of Porto programme, similarly, included both stronger practical and contextual and theoretical and conceptual components of their programme and therefore has stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+). The polytechnic placed emphasis on the theory and practice of language and communication, especially on Business Communication, translation and interpretation in a variety of European languages. The stronger practical and contextual component included the study of electronic tools for translation and interpreting, simulation of the translation of technical texts, Business and Organisational Documentation, Applied Computer Science, Intercultural Studies, Human Relations, and Office Management. There are clear lessons to be learned for the South African context, with its 11 official languages.

The Morrisville State College USA equivalent curriculum comprised mainly of stronger practical and contextual knowledge and therefore has stronger semantic gravity and weaker

semantic density (SG+SD-). Students were given access to laptop computers and advanced software which were integrated into the teaching and learning environment, rather than treated as separate academic subjects. Other highly contextual content included Business Organisation and Management, Office Administration Orientation, Human Resource Management, Administrative Secretarial Support Processes and electives such as Special Topics in Business and Salesmanship. Students on this programme also undertake an internship period during the final semester of the second year of study.

The programme of the Institute of Technology Carlow has both stronger practical and contextual and theoretical and conceptual components of their programme and therefore has stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+). The more practical contextual sections of the curriculum include: Document Production, Management, Quantitative Techniques, Office Administration, and Marketing, and electives of Human Resource Management and Supply Chain Management. Students receive practical training in a simulated office environment that gives them the opportunity to experience many of the technologies that are required for the efficient operation of a modern office.

7.2.2.2 Appropriate and inappropriate semantic density in the Office Management curricula
The logic of the OM curriculum is practice and therefore puts what Shay calls a "ceiling" on its semantic density (2013:573). This "ceiling" is a characteristic of many vocational curricula, and understanding where it might be located within a curriculum would help developers to understand which knowledge areas, particularly those representing semantic density, might be appropriate or inappropriate. The semantic density of the current curriculum is derived from subjects such as Communication, Financial Accounting, Legal Practice, and Mercantile Law syllabi.

The findings of this study show that the Mercantile Law syllabus is misaligned with the field of practice for office management. The inclusion of this subject was a misinformed attempt to include a more prestigious disciplinary field into the programme, and which has some connection with the early development of the programme in the training of legal secretaries. Legal secretaries are one of the few groups of practitioners in the field that have a clear status within the legal profession; thus this is particularly prestigious area for the qualification, and drawing on this historical relationship with the legal profession provides prestige and status to the programme. But the Legal Practice and Mercantile Law subject areas are inappropriate disciplinary bases for the field of practice. While the current curriculum might appear to have a stronger semantic density component, it is an inappropriate one.

It is difficult to assess the semantic density of the new curriculum, as an analysis of curriculum documents, subject guides, and in particular, assessment requirements, would need to be undertaken. Based on the analysis of the documentation at hand it appears that the stronger semantic density components of the programme are dispersed across the subjects of Communication, Business Accounting, and Legal Practice and Law of Contract. Of concern is the decrease in credits awarded to Communication and the standardised first-year syllabus, which may hamper the students' "epistemological access" (Morrow, 2009:1) to the professional disciplinary knowledge required for cumulative knowledge building.

By reducing and under-valuing the Business and Technical Communication knowledge and emphasising the technical components of office work, the curriculum is at risk of teaching procedures without emphasising the underpinning knowledge areas. The revised curriculum would therefore be seen to be building stronger semantic gravity in less appropriate areas, and reducing semantic density in core areas.

An emphasis on the core knowledge base of communication and language studies would strengthen the semantic density of the curriculum appropriately, as evidenced in most of the international programmes offering the same or similar curricula. The programme may require a stronger foundation in business communication rhetorical and discursive practices and an understanding of its genres. This would provide a strong foundation for language across the curriculum and provide the underlying principles for the study of information technology. Computer technologies will be constantly changing, but a foundation in business communication and practice would prepare students for current workplaces as well as those of the future. While computer applications will be changing, graduates would have the foundational knowledge for the context, audience and purpose of the communication, as well as the means to analyse the appropriate genres for the communication required in a specific workplace context.

Knowledge progression requires the strengthening of both semantic gravity and semantic density in ways that would be appropriate for the field of practice. This progression would be enabled by strengthening the business communication foundation of the programme. Higher education should promote cumulative learning and knowledge transfer in preparing learners for lifelong learning, the ever-changing workplace, and an unknown future (Maton, 2014:106).

Appropriate semantic density in international curricula

It was difficult to assess the semantic density of the international programmes without having access to all curriculum documents or the assessment tasks and mark weightings. The comparison was based on the analysis of the core curricula.

KaHo Sint-Lieven University College emphasises both the practical and contextual and theoretical and conceptual components of the programme. This curriculum has stronger semantic density than many other programmes. This is because there is a strong emphasis on language and business writing skills in Dutch, English, French, German or Spanish throughout the three years of the programme. Students are required to study Civil Law and European law topics, Economics, Financial and Trading Techniques, and Account Management, with the elective of Social Law. The ideal graduate of this programme is proficient in languages and business communication, with skills in information and communications technology, and business and organisation.

The programme of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto has a stronger practical and contextual component and a stronger theoretical and conceptual component. The stronger theoretical and conceptual component and concomitant stronger semantic density includes the study of Business English, German, Russian, French or Spanish, Communication Theory, Organisational Communication, Introduction to Economics and Accounting, Fundamentals of Law and Enterprise Law. The ideal graduate of this curriculum is proficient in languages, understands documentation and presentation, and has business language assistance and translations skills.

The programme of the Morrisville State College USA has a stronger practical and contextual component and a weaker theoretical and conceptual component, and therefore weaker semantic density characterises the programme. The theoretical and conceptual component of the curriculum includes the study of Business Law and a semester of Business Mathematics, Accounting, and Business Communication. The ideal graduate of this programme has proficient management, ICT, and communication knowledge and skills.

The Institute of Technology Carlow's programme emphasises both the practical and contextual and theoretical and conceptual components of the programme. The stronger theoretical and conceptual component and concomitant stronger semantic density includes the study of Financial Accounting, Economics, Business Law, and two electives of Business Psychology, Writing, Presentation and Research Skills, and French or German. The ideal

graduate of this curriculum has strong management and people skills, and proficiency in languages other than English.

<u>7.2.3 The ideal office manager implied in the Office Management Curricula</u>

In this section conclusions are drawn with regard to conceptualisation of the ideal office manager that emerges from the findings of this study. This section frames the conclusions in respect of the ideal office manager with the Specialisation dimension of LCT.

7.2.3.1 The ideal knower of the Office Management curricula

The OM graduate has characteristics that are associated with the "knower" codes, in which the epistemic relations are weaker (ER-) and the social relations are stronger (SR+). The high consensus ratings of the Delphi panel on the significance of critical skills and personal attributes emphasised these characteristics for the employability and future professional practices of OM graduates. The Delphi panel emphasised teamwork, listening skills, conflict resolution and control of one's emotions as important attributes of office managers. In the Personnel Management subject, in particular, these attributes are foregrounded, such as confidentiality, dealing with individuals, attitudes, and personal relationships in the workplace.

The new Diploma in OM has predominantly "knower" characteristics, thus indicating that the nature of the knower is the basis of legitimisation (Maton, 2014:30) in this field. The ideal graduate of the OM diploma should develop the attributes of honesty, integrity, loyalty, commitment, independence, punctuality, self-motivation, flexibility, common sense, self-confidence, a positive attitude and self-esteem, and be able to apply knowledge to new situations. Graduates should know how to organise and manage themselves, work effectively with others in a team, be able to multi-task, work under pressure, communicate effectively, and be able to collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information, embrace diversity in the workplace, and be compatible with company ethics.

However, these are generic attributes that would be desirable in almost any profession and this has posed difficulties for curriculum designers, hence the "generic" nature of much of the training in this field.

7.2.3.2 The knowledge needs of the Office Management curricula

The relative weakness of the epistemic relations (ER-) and the relative strength of the social relations (SR+) have tended to obscure the role and position of knowledge areas in the OM

diploma and foregrounded technical and mechanical "skills", rather than knowledge-based practices. Each of the subjects of the OM diploma comprises some knowledge area, but the subjects usually considered to have stronger epistemic relations, such as Financial Accounting (Business Accounting in the new curriculum) and Information Administration (Business Information Systems and Business Applications in the new curriculum), are not taken to a sufficiently high level to identify these areas as the clear epistemic base of the qualification.

Legal Practice and Mercantile Law (Law of Contract in the new curriculum) comprise knowledge areas that are inappropriate because they are misaligned with the scope of practice of office managers. Pressure to strengthen epistemic relations to enhance "the professionalism" of the programme, overlook the intrinsically social character of office management work. The inclusion of two law subjects in the programme ignores the intrinsic character of the work of office managers as facilitators, business communicators, and service providers.

The blind spot of the curriculum designers has been the specialist area of Business Communication. The inclusion of English and an African language, as well as the study of genre, applied linguistics, and business communication, would strengthen the disciplinary core of the OM curriculum.

Table 7.1 is a summary of the findings of the research project.

Table 7.1: Summary of the findings

DIMENSION		CURRENT CURRICULUM: National Diploma: OM		INTERNATIONAL CURRICULA		NEW CURRICULUM: DIPLOMA:OM
Positional Autonomy	PA +	**Academics assume control of the curriculum** as a result of the technikon system and absence of strong representation from the profession. **Education policies:** Higher Education Qualifications Framework and the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework **strengthened the autonomy of the universities of technology, providing them with degree-awarding status.** **Lack of strong professional bodies** in the field enabled the OM curriculum to remain under the control of the universities and not under the control of the practitioners: **maintaining stronger positional autonomy (PA+) of the academic institution.** **Conclusion: the curriculum of the ND Diploma in OM is largely controlled by academics, who have recontextualised the needs of the field through an academic "gaze".**	N/A	N/A	PA +	**In the process of revision:** there was an important shift: **Control of the current curriculum** is in the hands of the academic department and its academic staff. **Control over the design of the new curriculum is in the hands of faculty management**, in particular the faculty directives for "standardisation". **Standardisation** has predominately impacted the core knowledge area of the OM curriculum, namely **Communication.** **Maintaining stronger positional autonomy of managers (PA+)** and that of **academics is weakening**. **The effect** is the creation of tensions in positional autonomy. **Conclusion: the curriculum of the Diploma in OM is largely in the hands of the faculty management, in particular the faculty directives for "standardisation".**
Relational Autonomy	RA+	**A practical programme** that serves the needs for office management in developing economies. **May assume that employers and practitioners** would contribute to curricular decision making. **The lack of official representative bodies or councils** means the field of OM is widely dispersed and not formalised. Thus **stronger relational autonomy (RA+) of the academic institution.** **Curricular principles** have been recontextualised from the point of view of the academics: **from inside the institution, not from the profession.**	N/A	N/A	RA+	**Process of revision** involved members from industry, graduates, students and academics. **Academics felt that the curriculum should be strongly guided by principles drawn from practice.** **However, the lack of external structures to support strong professional involvement** resulted in **the development of the new OM curriculum remaining under the control of the university**. **BUT there is a shift towards the curricular principles, strategic objectives and cost-saving directives of the faculty management,** rather than those of the academic staff, resulting in **further recontextualisation and maintenance of stronger relational autonomy (RA+).**

Semantic gravity	SG+	This programme has stronger semantic gravity (SG+) or application and contextual component and has a weaker semantic density, or theoretical and conceptual component (SD-)	SG+	**KaHo Sint-Lieven University College curriculum: both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+) components.** Practical and contextual components: emphasis on the study of information and communication technologies, marketing, human resource management, sales, entrepreneurship, practical and work-based projects at each level, and a period of internship.	SG+	This programme has stronger semantic gravity (SG+) and weaker semantic density (SD-).
		This is a largely a practical programme emphasising the deeply contextual nature of the work of office administrators.				**Focus is on the Business Information Systems and Business Applications subjects.** Also has six-month internship which reveals the highly contextual nature of office management work.
		Focuses on the occupational practices of the office management profession and emphasises the work-based learning element in which students are required to undertake six months of internship –-strengthening its semantic gravity.	SG+	**The Polytechnic Institute of Porto curriculum: both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+) components.** Practical and contextual components: electronic tools for translation and interpreting, simulation of the translation of technical texts, applied computer science, business and organisational documentation, human relations, intercultural studies, and office management.		**Emphasis on application strongly grounded in practices with the increase in the complexity** of the practical applications from first to third year. There is engagement with increasing contextuality, raising the semantic gravity.
		Information Administration skills are seen as important for enhancing the employability of office administrators, and for meeting the demands of the workplace.				**The new curriculum addresses many of the needs of the employers and practitioners** but over-emphasises the computer applications component of the programme to address the changing office technology environment.
		The curriculum revision process provided **the opportunity for the updating of the technology and software requirements in response to the demands** of the employers and practitioners in the field of practice.	SG+	**The Morrisville State College USA curriculum: stronger semantic gravity and weaker semantic density (SG+SD-) components.** Highly contextual components: laptop computers and advanced software integrated into the teaching and learning environment, office administration orientation, business organisation and management, human resource management, administrative secretarial support processes, salesmanship, special topics in business, and internship.		**Need to focus on its foundation**, rather than on constantly re-learning new applications, as the emphasis is on the mechanics of communication, i.e., "computer technology" and not communication as a knowledge field itself.
		Field of information technology is constantly changing.				**Emphasis on the technical requirements is evidence of "knowledge blindness"** (Maton, 2014:3) amongst employers and practitioners in the field of practice of OM and may weaken the disciplinary core of the programme, which is essential for cumulative knowledge building.
		Emphasis on the "technology" without an emphasis on the communication knowledge principles which underpin this technology is **evidence of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3) in the curriculum**.	SG+	**The Institute of Technology Carlow:** **both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+) components.** Practical and contextual components: document production, quantitative techniques, office administration, management, marketing, human resource management, supply chain management and practical training in a simulated office environment.		**Essential disciplinary knowledge base of communication studies** not ignored by practitioners but the immediate workplace demands for "computer technology" skills were given priority.
		Refers to the early days of the development of the curriculum when the emphasis was on "shorthand" and **not on the literacy skills of secretaries.**				**Workplace of the future** will comprise different computer technologies and applications for which universities of technology may not be able to prepare graduates adequately.
						A solid disciplinary core of communication theory, knowledge of business communication genres and technical communication will provide the basis for the transfer of knowledge, enabling graduates to meet the future demands of their workplaces.

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| Semantic density | SD- | The logic of the OM curriculum is practice and puts a "ceiling" on its semantic density (Shay, 2013:573) which is characteristic of many vocational curricula.

Understanding of where this "ceiling" is located in the curriculum will help curriculum developers to understand which knowledge areas, particularly those representing semantic density, might be appropriate or inappropriate.

The semantic density of the current curriculum is derived from subjects such as **Communication, Financial Accounting, Legal Practice and Mercantile Law syllabi.**

The findings show that the Mercantile Law syllabus is misaligned with the field of practice for OM.

The inclusion of this subject is a misinformed attempt to include a more prestigious disciplinary field into the programme.

This inclusion has some connection with the early development of the programme in the training of legal secretaries, a profession with a clear status within the legal profession. Drawing on this historical relationship with the legal profession provides prestige and status to the programme.

The Legal Practice and Mercantile Law subject areas are an inappropriate disciplinary base for the field of practice.

The current curriculum appears to have stronger semantic density component **but it is an inappropriate one.** | SD+

SD+

SD-

SD+ | **KaHo Sint-Lieven University College curriculum: both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density (SG+SD+) components.**
Strong emphasis on language and business writing skills in Dutch, English, French, German or Spanish, study of Civil Law and European law topics, financial and trading techniques, economics and accounting.
The ideal graduate is proficient in languages and in business communication, with ICT, and business and organisational skills.

The Polytechnic Institute of Porto curriculum: a both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density components. (SG+SD+)
Emphasis on communication theory, Business English, German, Russian, French or Spanish languages, introduction to economics and accounting, fundamentals of law and enterprise law.
The ideal graduate is proficient in languages, understands documentation presentation and has business language assistance and translations skills.

The Morrisville State College USA curriculum: stronger semantic gravity and weaker semantic density (SG+SD-) components.
Theoretical and conceptual content of business mathematics, business law, accounting, business communication.
The ideal graduate has proficient management, ICT, and communication knowledge and skills.

The Institute of Technology Carlow curriculum: both stronger semantic gravity and stronger semantic density components. (SG+SD+)
Theoretical and conceptual content of financial accounting, economics, business law, business psychology, writing, presentation and research, and French or German.
The ideal graduate has strong management and people skills, and proficiency in languages other than English. | SD- | **Difficult to assess the semantic density of the new curriculum** but based on analysis of documentation at hand it **appears that the stronger semantic density** elements of the programme is dispersed across the subjects of **Communication, Business Accounting, Legal Practice and Law of Contract.**

Decrease in credits for Communication and the standardisation of the first-year syllabus may hamper students' "epistemological access" (Morrow, 2009:1) to the professional disciplinary knowledge required for cumulative knowledge building.

By reducing and under-valuing the Business and Technical Communication knowledge, and emphasising the technical components of office work, the curriculum is at risk of teaching procedures without emphasising the core knowledge areas.

Emphasis on core knowledge base of communication and language studies would strengthen the semantic density of the curriculum appropriately.

A stronger foundation in business communication rhetorical and discursive practices and an understanding of its genres will provide a strong foundation for language across the curriculum and provide the underlying principles for the study of information technology, which is constantly changing.

Grounding in business communication and practice will prepare graduates for current and future workplaces as students will have foundational knowledge of context, audience and purpose, and the means to analyse the appropriate genres for communication required in a specific workplace context.

Knowledge progression is strengthening of both semantic gravity and semantic density in ways appropriate to the field of practice. This would be enabled by **strengthening the business communication foundation** to promote cumulative learning and knowledge transfer in preparing learners for lifelong learning, the ever changing workplace and an unknown future. |

			N/A			
Epistemic relations	ER-	**Relative weakness of the epistemic relations (ER-) and r**elative **strength of the social relations (SR+)** tended to **obscure knowledge areas** and foreground technical and mechanical "skills" rather than knowledge-based practices. **Each of the subjects of the OM diploma** comprises some knowledge area. **No clear epistemic base: Financial Accounting and Information Administration considered to have stronger epistemic relations but are not taken to a sufficiently high level.** **Legal Practice and Mercantile Law comprise knowledge areas that are inappropriate** as misaligned with the OM field of practice. **Pressure to strengthen the epistemic relations to enhance "the professionalism" of the programme overlook the intrinsically social character of the work of office managers as business communicators, facilitators, and service providers.**	N/A	N/A	ER-	**Relative weakness of the epistemic relations (ER-) and r**elative **strength of the social relations (SR+)** tended to **obscure the knowledge areas** of the new diploma and **foregrounding technical and mechanical "skills"** **No clear epistemic base: Business Accounting considered having stronger epistemic relations but it is not taken to a sufficiently high level.** **Business Information Systems and Business Applications** knowledge code qualities strengthened **during process of recurriculation.** **Legal Practice and Law of Contract comprise knowledge areas, but the Law of Contract syllabus is** misaligned with the field of practice. **The inclusion of two law subjects in the programme ignores the intrinsic character of the work of office managers as facilitators, business communicators, and service providers.** **The blind spot** of curriculum designers **is the specialist area of Business Communication.** **The study of genres, applied linguistics and Business Communication would strengthen the disciplinary core.**
Social relations	SR+	**The OM graduate has characteristics that are associated with the "knower' codes": epistemic relations are weaker (ER-) and social relations are stronger (SR+).** **The high consensus of the Delphi panel shows the significance of critical skills and personal attributes** and their importance for the graduates' employability and future professional practices. **Emphasis:** teamwork, listening skills, conflict resolution and control of one's emotions, upholding of confidentiality, dealing with individuals, positive attitudes and personal relationships in the workplace are important attributes for office managers.	N/A	N/A	SR+	**"Knower" characteristics showing nature of the knower are basis of legitimisation** (Maton, 2014:30): **Epistemic relations are weaker (ER-) and social relations are stronger (SR+).** **Ideal graduates** should acquire attributes of honesty, integrity, loyalty, commitment, independence, punctuality, self-motivation, flexibility, common sense, self-confidence, a positive attitude and self-esteem, be able to apply knowledge to new situations, know how to organise and manage themselves, work effectively with others in a team, be able to multi-task, work under pressure, communicate effectively, and collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information, embrace diversity in the workplace and be compatible with company ethics. **These are generic attributes and desirable in almost any profession**, thus causing difficulties for curriculum designers and contributing to the "generic" nature of much training in this field.

7.3 The guiding research questions were as follows:

1. Who decided on the knowledge bases of the OM curriculum?
2. What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the current and new qualifications for office administrators?
3. What attributes are implied by the current and new qualifications for the role of office administrator?
4. What is the knowledge base of OM work?

7.3.1 Who decided on the knowledge bases of the Office Management curriculum?

The analysis of the current OM curriculum identified strong institutional autonomy (PA+RA+) in curricular decision making. The specific positions within higher education and those outside of the university, such as industry, the marketplace, and the government (Maton, 2005:697) have, in the case of the OM diploma, enabled the high level of institutional autonomy. In the new diploma the positional autonomy is shifted from academic Autonomy to a strengthening of faculty and management Autonomy. The lack of strong professional bodies further enables the relational autonomy of institutions in recontextualising the needs of the workplace through an academic "gaze". The findings show that the OM curriculum is strongly insulated by academic and management positional and relational autonomy (PA+RA+).

7.3 1.1 Positional autonomy: institutional control and university status

In the case of universities of technology, stronger positional autonomy would imply that the university is free from interference from influences outside the university, and that it is autonomous and insulated. The policies of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (DoE, 2007:5) and the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (SAQA, 2013:6) have strengthened the autonomy of universities of technology and empowered them to offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. The development of the current OM curriculum shows the struggle for status in the various changes in nomenclature from the label of "Secretarial Studies" towards more prestigious titles that legitimise the inclusion of the programme in a degree-awarding university of technology. These developments have enabled the control of the current OM curriculum and the new OM curriculum to remain in the hands of the universities, rather than of practitioners thereby maintaining stronger positional autonomy (PA+).

Within higher education in South African it has become common practice to draw on principles from external areas of practice, resulting in the bureaucratisation and marketisation

of the higher education sector and tensions in autonomy within the academic faculty (Maton, 2005:701). An example of this process is evident in some of the departments, which imposed within the recurriculation process, the standardisation of a number of first-year syllabi. This represents the control of the curricula within departments and the evidence of the bureaucratisation of higher education.

7.3.1.2 Relational autonomy: institutional and faculty directives

Relational autonomy relates to who controls the decision-making process regarding the curriculum. It refers to how knowledge is selected, sequenced, paced and evaluated. The investigation into whose principles matter in the development of the current OM curriculum showed that academics and practitioners have attempted to develop a curriculum which is removed from the negative connotations of "background and invisible" office work (Star & Strauss, 1999:14). The current curriculum is underpinned by knowledge domains that are considered legitimate in the context of higher education. Attempts have been made to include academic subjects associated with more prestigious qualifications such as Personnel Management, Information Administration, Legal Practice, and Mercantile Law to meet the apparent contemporary demands of the profession. This process has weakened the essential knowledge base of secretarial work of writing and communication practices.

The investigation of the relational autonomy of the new curriculum shows that internal faculty directives have resulted in some first-year syllabi such as Communication, Accounting, Legal Studies and Economics being standardised. While the premise for the standardisation process may be sound, there are concerns that this process may neglect the possibility for specialisation and the need for the development of professional identity and cumulative knowledge building in specific professional fields. The Advisory Committee of the OM Department has had significant input into the content of both the current and new OM curricula. This is imperative for a professional curriculum, as what is taught should relate to the realities of the professional field. Most of this feedback from the employers, practitioners, third-year students and alumni was considered in the recurriculation process of the new curriculum, but the lack of an official council or controlling board for office work has resulted in the decision making of the curriculum remaining under the control of the universities, particularly under the control of the faculty management. The curricular principles informing the selection, sequence, pacing and evaluation of the OM curricula have strong relational autonomy (RA+) as they are based on the principles of the academic body within the faculty.

7.3.2 What knowledge areas were drawn on in the development of the current and new qualifications for office administrators?

The OM curriculum may be described as approximating to Muller's (2009:216) description of curricula with contextual coherence, where the logic of the curriculum is that of the professional or occupational requirements and "what matters is coherence to context". The biggest challenge for vocational curricula that have a strong practical component is to redevelop them so that they "face both ways" (Barnett, 2006:152) or draw on both practical and theoretical knowledge bases. The OM curricula face "outwards towards the occupational practices of the profession" (Shay & Steyn, 2015:4 forthcoming); this allows for flexibility and the accommodation of changes to respond to the dynamic needs of the profession. The challenge is to ensure that these curricula supply students with the theoretical knowledge that underpins practice (Wheelehan, 2010:4).

The field of study of OM could be described as a form of vertical discourse with a horizontal knowledge structure (Bernstein, 2000:157,161). The knowledge structure has originated from applied language studies, applied linguistics, and technical and business communication. Office administrative studies have weak boundaries that result in the field's absorbing most of its ideas and practices from other disciplines such as information administration, management practice, and law. It is a practical and contextual programme that has stronger semantic gravity and weaker semantic density (SG+SD-). It is a curriculum drawing largely on practical knowledge and is dependent upon and ordered by the world of practice.

7.3.2.1 Semantic gravity: the Office Management curricula

Analysis of the Information Administration syllabi of the current curriculum revealed that the course content is practice-based, constantly updated and has stronger semantic gravity. The new course content has been divided into Business Information Systems and Business Applications in an attempt to address these challenges and the needs of employers and practitioners who have called for more practical application, and the inclusion of updated and advanced software. Academic staff members label the component, which is lectured in the classroom, as theory, and content addressed in the laboratory, as practical. This is an example of code clash (Howard & Maton, 2011:202), where practice-based subjects are taught in a theoretical way, and this is a misunderstanding based on the pedagogy and not the curriculum. The emphasis of these syllabi in the new curriculum and the necessity for staying abreast of current software applications may result in a narrow focus on knowledge that is perceived to deliver benefits for the workplace (Hordern, 2014:389). This may be at the expense of

cumulative knowledge building and diminish the significance of the communicative and literary role of the office manager.

The current Business Administration syllabi were highly rated by the Delphi panel but the syllabi included the excessively high distribution of credits to topics, the focus on human resource management and labour relations, and the need for the simulation of workplace scenarios and implementation. The new Business Administration syllabi show that much of the feedback from employers and practitioners has been addressed. Applied professional ethics is not addressed but will be included in the new Diversity Management syllabus, and the recurriculation of the current Personnel Management and the current Mercantile Law syllabi has necessitated the inclusion of human resource management and labour-relations components into the new Business Administration subjects.

The current Personnel Management syllabus was critiqued for insufficient simulation of workplace scenarios, which are necessary for students to acquire the knowledge and skills for application in the workplace. However, in the new syllabus, Workplace Psychology has moved the emphasis away from the management of staff, to a generic approach with the emphasis on the organisational dynamics of behaviour, social behaviour and processes. The problems of the current OM Practical have been addressed in the new curriculum. The Module A component has been removed and the distribution of credits increased in accordance with the six-month internship in the workplace. The syllabus comprises stronger semantic gravity, as students are exposed to the practical implementation and application of the knowledge learned across the curriculum over a period of two years. The new syllabus of Diversity Management has been incorporated into the recurriculated Diploma curriculum and will include the study of ethical leadership and ethical business practices.

7.3.2.2 Semantic density: the Office Management curricula

Shay and Steyn (2015:4 forthcoming) argue that capacity for knowledge progression is in the strengthening of semantic density and semantic gravity, which provide the student with access to powerful knowledge. This is more than applied theoretical knowledge, but the "knowledge growth that requires a deep engagement with its context, with particularity, with specific problems and in the process transforms consciousness and identity" (Shay & Steyn, 2015:18 forthcoming).

The earliest secretarial training emphasised the study of language, communication and writing. However, the current curriculum comprises two years of Communication, but it is not

the main focus of the OM curriculum, and the new curriculum has a reduction in the distribution of credits to the Communication syllabi. These syllabi should be considered a major component of the curriculum, as the findings show the value placed by employers, practitioners and students on the writing and communication skills that underpin the work of the office manager. The introduction of multi-literacy skills, evident in the international curricula in Chapter 5, together with the study of genres, and rhetorical and discourse analysis, would strengthen the semantic density foundation of the curriculum and promote the employability of graduates.

The Delphi panel's review of the content of the current Financial Accounting syllabus revealed that employers did not place as high a value as the graduates and academics on the course content. The findings show that the course content does not need to comprise a stronger semantic density component for the field of practice, and the standardised new Business Accounting syllabus will be appropriate for the requirements of the office manager in the field of practice. The Legal Practice and Mercantile Law (Law of Contract in the new curriculum) syllabi did not receive a high rating from employers, practitioners and students regarding its significance to fostering the work readiness of graduates. While it is evident that office managers require some knowledge of legal practices, they need to have knowledge that is legitimate for the field of practice. The new Diploma: OM still comprises both these syllabi. The new Legal Practice syllabus attempts to include knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment by graduates' applying legal rules and principles to practical situations, but the Law of Contract syllabus no longer comprises the labour law component valued by employers and practitioners. It is therefore misaligned with the requirements of the field of practice.

7.3.3 What attributes are implied by the current and new qualifications for the role of office administrator?

Identifying the ideal graduate or knower is part of the debate on what it means to be educated in the knowledge society of the 21st century. The question arising from the debate on the graduate emerging from a diploma curriculum is, "What is critical to the employability of the graduate?" While the nature of office management work is varied, the inherently social nature of the role of office administrators and office managers is evident, as they are responsible for the management of internal and external information flow and ensuring the confidentiality of company information (Biebuyck, 2006:10, 11). Professional curricula are overtly about the establishment of a specific kind of knower or "projected identity" (Bernstein, 2000:55). The Specialisation code of LCT enables the identification of the ideal graduate of the OM

diploma. The findings show that the OM curricula incorporate mainly knower code characteristics, where the social relations are stronger and are required for graduates to succeed in the field of practice. It is a programme that has weaker epistemic relations (ER-) and stronger social relations (SR+).

7.3.3.1 The knower code

The current and new OM curricula comprise predominantly knower code characteristics. The OM graduate should be a generalist who is able to work across a wide range of areas in supportive administrative positions. However, the knower code qualities highly regarded for the work of office administrators and office managers are not exclusive to the field of practice. This has contributed to the difficulty for the designers of the curricula for office managers. There is strong consensus from employers and practitioners on the generic qualities such as confidentiality, dealing with individuals, participating in teamwork and the appropriate attitudes and behaviour for graduates entering the field of practice. However, the generic nature of these attributes obscures the knowledge base, as these generic attributes could be applied to almost any professional knowledge base.

7.3.3.2 The knowledge code

Both the current and new curricula include components of the knowledge code. The current Financial Accounting syllabus, usually considered to comprise knowledge code qualities, has been standardised in the new curriculum and therefore is only offered at a basic level for non-accounting students. The Information Administration syllabi of the current curriculum have knowledge code qualities that have been strengthened during the process of recurriculation. The knowledge code qualities of the Information Administration, and Business Information Systems and Business Applications syllabi are highly rated by the employers and practitioners in the field of practice and provide the foundation for the application and implementation of information technology skills in the workplace. However, the over-emphasis on the practical and contextual knowledge components of the curriculum may result in the weakening of the knowledge base of the curriculum. The Legal Practice and Mercantile Law (Law of Contract in the new curriculum) syllabi contain elements of the knowledge code, but the findings show that the content of these syllabi is not considered as highly significant to the fostering of employability of graduates and is not powerful knowledge for the field of practice of office administration.

<u>7.3.4 What is the knowledge base of office management work?</u>

The final research question addresses what "counts" as knowledge in the OM diploma. The "recontextualization of theoretical knowledge for vocational purposes" (Shay, 2013:577) includes substantial curriculum and pedagogical challenges. The development of the OM curriculum has shown evidence of these challenges, as well as the challenges of developing a programme which comprises the varied and apparent "generic" nature of the work of office administrators and office managers, which has caused difficulties for curriculum developers. The conceptualising of the core knowledge of the OM curriculum, and the recognition of the attributes and values which are necessary to carry out office management work, provide the definition for the knowledge base of service for office administrators.

The findings show that the knowledge base of OM work is that of professional service and support. The curricular arrangement for office management studies comprises the work of the profession of office administration in support of people in a range of different industries. What characterises the curriculum on which this is based is the knowledge base of communication, information technology, administrative and interpersonal skills in support of the effective management of the corporate administration of organisations in the attainment of their business goals and objectives. To carry out this work in a professional manner, office managers need to have a solid disciplinary foundation of business communication knowledge and skills, and personal organisational skills, and need to be able to work effectively with others, uphold confidentiality, multi-task, work under stress, manage information effectively, have effective decision-making skills, be self-motivated, be able to embrace diversity, and be compatible with company ethics. The office manager needs to be reliable, honest, have loyalty, commitment, be independent, punctual, motivated, and adaptable, have common sense, a positive attitude, positive self-esteem, enthusiasm, be able to apply knowledge to new situations, and be self-confident.

In professional education "most would agree that the goal of university education is not only to immerse students in the sciences and humanities for their own intellectual growth, but to prepare them for their occupation and public service" (Winberg et al., 2012:2). For OM graduates to contribute to their field of practice and to enable them to participate in broader roles in South African society, they need to have access to disciplinary knowledge that underpins professional practice and to create skilled and ethical practice (Winberg et al., 2012:2). Access to strong disciplinary knowledge for the OM curricula would be that of the subject of Communication, and specifically Business and Technical Communication. This

would provide an understanding of the field of practice and underpin the professional practice of office administrators.

Articles in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* refer to specialised communication courses offered within disciplines such as engineering and business. The teaching of writing in the disciplines and Business and Technical Communication can therefore not be separated and have always been linked with these disciplines, "attending and responding to them, in one way or another" (Russell, 2007:248). The Communication syllabi of the new OM curriculum should prepare students for writing across the curriculum, which is the preparation of students to write in an academic environment (Bosley, 2000:1). It should also prepare students for writing in the disciplines within the curriculum with the technical communication component focusing on preparing students for writing for the workplace (Bosley, 2000:1). Writing mediates the activities of disciplines and professions, "showing students (and faculty) how their own discipline works, its knowledge base and its social and communicative structure" (Russell, 2007:255).

Writing is not a single set of skills but is bound with complex questions of motive, tools, identity and processes. Students need to understand the forms of arguments, claims, use of evidence, use of the first person, document design and so on in their specific discipline and profession (Russell, 2007:256). The study of the discourse, knowledge base and work of students' profession as office administrators and office managers will enable students to develop a reflective and critical view of their knowledge and work. Emphasis should also be given to workplace communication practices of reviewing and editing, so that one hundred percent accurate writing is produced to meet the specific requirements of multiple audiences (Hollis-Turner, 2008:103).

Communication academics are also not aware of all workplace communication practices such as document cycling – "the drafting of a document by a single writer, with subsequent review by supervisors and other stakeholders – as the most common form of collaborative writing in workplace environments" (DeKay, 2007:1). This process is one among many activities such as establishing budget priorities and so on, and depends upon the review of authorised members of the organisation. The analysis of workplace texts and a solid knowledge of the theories, principles, and processes of effective written, oral, visual, and business communication, as well as audience analysis, will provide graduates with the knowledge they need to meet the challenges of the constantly changing ICT demands of the workplace. Therefore, business communication academics need to take into account the workplace

practices in the preparation of the graduates, which cannot be separated from organisational context, but also provide students with a solid foundation for cumulative knowledge building.

7. 4 Limitations of this research project

The limitations of this research project are as follows:

The Delphi panel consisted of employers, graduates and academics. At least three of the employers were graduates of the OM curriculum at CPUT and are in senior positions in their organisations. However, the Delphi panel should have included a number of more senior employers who had entered the field of practice as office administrators and had progressed to management level to obtain a more complete picture of the progress of office administrators in the workplace.

The new recurriculated OM programme has not yet been implemented and is work in progress. Documentation on course work and assessments was therefore not available for analysis and it was necessary to consult the current curricular documentation to assist with the analysis.

The findings also show that the development of the Advanced Diploma OM may incur the same problems as that of the Diploma and not comprise a strong disciplinary base. The recommendations of this research project may assist with this problem.

7.5 Developing a disciplinary core for the Office Management curriculum

The findings from the analysis of the current, international and new OM curricula have been drawn on in the development of the ideal disciplinary base for the OM curriculum.

7.5.1 Objectives for training of secretaries, office administrators and managers

In order to establish a Communication course that will provide the disciplinary foundation of the recurriculated OM programme, it is necessary to examine the objectives of the training provided for secretaries, office administrators and managers in South Africa and the communication studies of these curricula. The Communication studies of the Secretarial National Diploma at a Further Education and Training College, the Communication subjects at a university of technology, and the content of a bachelor's degree in Corporate Communication show the depth of knowledge requirements for each programme.

The objectives of a Secretarial National Diploma at a Further Education and Training College are that graduates will obtain skills that will prepare them to take control of and cope with all facets of any secretarial or administrative position (Northlink FET College, 2014). Students can select the Management Assistant Secretarial National Diploma or the Legal Secretary National Diploma. The programme covers six months each for the N4, N5 and N6 levels, and then students are required to gain 18 months' workplace experience to qualify for the Diploma. For the qualification of Management Assistant, students study Information Processing, Office Practice, Communication, Computer Practice, and Legal Practice (optional offerings are Entrepreneurship and Public Relations). The qualification of Legal Secretary comprises Information Processing, Office Practice, Communication, Computer Practice, Mercantile Law, and Legal Practice (Northlink FET College, 2014).

The Communication studies includes the study of basic communication principles, interpersonal relationships and social interactions, organisational communication, interviews, meeting procedure and meeting documentation, language usage, media for concise business communication, notices, letters, reports, critical evaluation and editing of written material, oral communication, formulation of aims and objectives, media communication and advertising, presentation communication, and multicultural communication in the business world (Northlink FET College, 2014).

At the university of technology, the aim of the qualification is to prepare administrative assistants and office managers with a professional qualification comprising critical office management skills (CPUT, 2014a:8). As a professional qualification, the Diploma is required to be responsive to changes in the workplace and to prepare students for the future workplace (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2013:461) and for a more specific form of work. The aim of the Communication curriculum is for students to "demonstrate an understanding of the importance of communication in interpersonal as well as corporate contexts, and to communicate effectively both orally and in writing in professional environments" (CPUT, 2014a:9). The Communication 1 and 2 syllabi comprise the study of an introduction to communication theory and communication practice in the business world: verbal and non-verbal communication, intercultural communication, and small group communication. Listening and oral communication theory and presentations, reading practices, comprehension, summary writing and referencing are also included. The syllabi also include business correspondence: letter writing and concise correspondence, report writing, proposal writing, organisational communication, group dynamics and conflict resolution, meeting

theory and meeting correspondence, critical thinking skills, professional self-development, job application and interview skills (CPUT, 2014a:15).

The curriculum for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Corporate Communication at an academic higher education university in South Africa aims to develop students' applied competence, including the attainment and application of corporate communication principles. Students will be able to communicate using suitable scientific language and technical terminology. The course content at first year level includes the study of the Introduction to Communication, the selection of a second major chosen from the fields of Politics, Business Management, Public Management and Governance, Development Studies, Industrial Psychology, Information Management, Psychology and Sociology. Subjects also include Corporate Communication, Afrikaans or English, Statistical Methods, Communication, Mass Communication and the selection of one of the fields of study not chosen as the second major including Linguistics and Literary Theory or Cross-Cultural Communication. At the second year level students study Corporate Communication, and the second major which they selected. They also study the Introduction to Communication Theories, Communication Research and a minor subject of their choosing. The third year comprises the study of Corporate Communication, the second major, Organisational Communication and Global Communication (University of Johannesburg, 2014).

Another academic university in South Africa offers NQF level 5 programmes on intercultural communication and mentoring in the workplace to assist students in understanding human communication in diverse settings focusing on mass media and/or the workplace (Wits Language School, 2014). The course comprises the study of communication in the business and management context, powerful communication, pacing and leading, motivation, as well as conflict management and mentoring in the workplace. This course may be taken as a stand-alone short course, or as part of the Diploma in Legal Interpreting (Wits Language School, 2014).

These programmes and communication studies show that graduates of the Further Education and Training Colleges should be able to enter the workplace as secretaries or assistants to paralegals in a legal organisation. The graduates of universities of technology should be able to enter the workplace as administrative assistants and office managers. The graduates of university programmes should be able to manage the context of corporate communication.

Studer (2013:193) argues that more efficient communication and language skills contribute to improved performance and productivity as a result of employee satisfaction, improved management, and relationships with customers. The training of office administrators and office managers therefore needs to prepare graduates to be effective communicators in the workplace. A framework for the ideal disciplinary base for the OM curricula would provide students with the linguistic skills required for their entry into the workplace and also for the challenges of the future workplace.

7.5.2 The framework for the ideal disciplinary base for the Office Management curriculum

The study of language in the context of business is considered to be highly interdisciplinary and includes the full range of written and spoken "products" of an organisation (Studer, 2013:187). A study of communication journals provides guidelines for the content of a strong communication course. The establishment of a strong disciplinary core for the new curriculum would need to be that of communication studies, comprising strong grounding in the rhetorical and discursive practices of business communication and an understanding of its genres. Genres can be described as a "classification concept referring to a category of written text or spoken language event employed to fulfil a recognized communication purpose (or set of purposes) within a particular context" (Bruce, 2014:319).

Communication syllabi in professional curricula are in fact business communication studies which do not really stand alone as it exists in a curricular environment that responds to the overall objectives of the curriculum (Reich, 1991:233). The purpose of a genre is not simply an individual's reason for communicating with the receiver of the message, but rather "socially constructed and recognised by the relevant organisational community for typical situations" (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002:15). Graduates need to obtain genre knowledge to understand and recognise the rules and conventions of a particular kind of written text: for example, academic, business, and instant messaging. The aim of the genre map below is for the implementation of both individual and team assignments and activities including role play, presentations and case studies that encourage students to learn from one another by making use of writing tools, such as discussion boards, as well as in-class discussions, analysis and reflection (Gulbrandsen, 2012:251). Table 7.2 shows the framework of the Communication discipline that comprises the study of communication theory, academic, professional and business communication, specialised communication and technical communication genres.

Table 7.2: Framework for the ideal Communication discipline

Communication theory	Academic Genres	Professional and business communication genres	Specialised communication genres	Technical communication genres
Communication process: sender, receiver, medium, feedback, barriers, verbal and non-verbal **Workplace communication theory:** Audience analysis Attitude and behaviour Personal attributes Professional self-development Group dynamics and conflict resolution Multicultural communication Time management Workplace ethics	**Assignment writing:** Research essay Question analysis Sourcing Reading practices: (scanning and skimming) Summary writing Referencing (in-text and reference list) Literature review **Essay planning:** Structure and style Audience Purpose Register Tone **Grammatical structure and functions**	**Concise business messages** – memo, email, facsimile **Business documentation:** Business letters Report writing Short proposals CV writing **Oral presentations:** Individual and team presentations Telephone skills **Rhetorical knowledge:** the purpose(s) of a text, Audience Register Tone **Discourse knowledge:** expectations and needs of writers and readers who take part in discussions on a subject **Organisational communication**	**Meeting procedures and documentation:** Organisational functions and meeting styles, management activities (planning, organising, leading, controlling, interacting) Powerful communication Motivation Conflict management **Business newsletters** **Annual reports** **English and another official language. For example, isiXhosa**	**Instant text messaging** **Computer technologies and applications** **Virtual teams communication** **Reviewing and editing** **Visual presentations and display of data** **Online communication ethics**

Communication theory includes the study of the communication process – the sender, receiver, medium, feedback, communication barriers, and verbal and non-verbal communication. Workplace theory includes the study of the knowledge of audience analysis and the target audience, which would provide a solid understanding of what would be required in various contexts. For example, when the graduate is required to do an oral presentation, knowledge of the audience and purpose of the speech is required. It would also include the study of the appropriate attitudes, behaviours, and personal attributes, professional self-development, group dynamics, conflict resolution, multicultural communication, time management and workplace ethics that are needed to prepare students for the workplace.

The study of academic genres prepares students to write for academics who are the audience of the academic essay (Paretti, 2006:189). Students need to know the structure, style, purpose, tone, and register suitable for this form of communication. They require knowledge of how to source information for research for essays, implement effective reading practices and question analysis, summarise and reference sources. The study of academic genres includes knowledge of the appropriate grammatical structures and functions, comprising parts of speech, sentence analysis and style, and rhetorical grammar and academic terminology. Academic literacy studies can no longer only focus on the written assignment, as the increasing use of information and communications technology in contemporary higher education contexts has to be considered (Lea, 2004:743). For example, the use of MS Word for the writing of essays may need to include the use of PowerPoint if students are required to do a presentation on their academic essay.

Professional and business communication genres will include the study of concise business messages such as the memo, email and facsimile; business documentation comprising business letters, report writing, short proposals, and CVs; and oral presentations comprising individual and team presentations, and telephone skills. Graduates would also require rhetorical knowledge regarding an understanding of the purpose(s) of a text, and the audience who will read such a text, as well as knowledge of the discourse community to understand the various expectations and needs of writers and readers in the workplace (Walters et al., 2007: 5). In the context of organisational communication, graduates will have to communicate orally and in writing for multiple audiences to share information by means of recognised genre types of communication, such as letters, memoranda and emails (Yates & Orlikowshi, 1992:300).

Business communication is directed towards achieving the goals of the company. The audiences in the workplace usually have specific information and communication needs, for example, to be addressed politely, and graduates need to reflect a professional tone and style. Genre knowledge and rhetorical and discourse analysis skills will enable graduates to pay attention to the "political considerations in workplace writing" (Schneider & Andre, 2005: 203) and communication. Graduates will be in a position to analyse, critically review and edit documentation, which are essential communication skills for the office administrator in the workplace (Hollis-Turner, 2008:89).

The study of specialised communication genres includes the study of meeting procedures and documentation, organisational functions and meeting styles, management activities (planning, organising, leading, controlling, interacting), powerful communication, and motivation, as

well as conflict management in the workplace, the writing of business newsletters and annual reports, and the study of English and another official language, for example, isiXhosa. The purpose of some of the writings produced in the workplace is to create records or "organisational memory" (Geisler et al., 2001:279) of the interactions and transactions between clients and the company. For example, the minutes of meetings need to be error free, as the recordings of activities at the meetings of companies often contain information of decisions taken which are legally binding. The genre of annual reports has changed focus; where previously there was a concentration on financial data, it has more recently shifted to promotional information about the organisation's activities and achievements (Bruce, 2014:316). Knowledge of this genre of corporate disclosure, namely the annual report, would be beneficial to those graduates who wish to acquire positions such as company secretary.

Technical communication genres include communication using instant text messaging, computer technologies and applications, virtual teams communication, reviewing and editing skills, visual presentations, and display of data, as well as online communication ethics. The content of the new Business Applications syllabi will be constantly changing and what may be appropriate now, for example, the use of word processing packages, spreadsheets, and so on, may require knowledge of new applications for the future workplace. However, a solid foundation of business and technical communication knowledge and skills will enable the OM graduate to apply this knowledge to the use of new computer applications required in the workplace of the future. Graduates need to be able to analyse documentation critically to ensure that it is appropriate, concise and to the point, and written in the powerful and persuasive language needed to convey and share information in the workplace.

The language in many email messages is usually more informal and colloquial than that generally used in memos, and spelling and grammatical errors usually considered inappropriate tend to be tolerated in emails (Yates & Orlikowshi, 1992:317). Graduates need to be aware of the genre rules of memo writing to apply these to emails in the business context. The incorporation of communication in virtual teams and instant messaging in the workplace requires that graduates be prepared to utilise these media. The use of instant messaging in the workplace might result in unconventional language use and the neglect of recognised communicative norms. Students therefore need to understand what this genre entails and how it impacts on workplace communication (Darics, 2014:339). To do so, graduates need to have practice in business writing and have a thorough knowledge of the appropriate genre (e.g. memo, letter or report) and an understanding of the ethical implications of electronic communication media for the production of texts in the workplace.

Knowledge of the effective use of these media for business communication, rhetorical and discourse analysis of documents, and of genre theory, as well as the creation of opportunities for field work, site visits, job shadowing and voluntary work, would ensure that OM students "develop into professionals through communication" (Russell, 2007:258) and "powerful meaning-makers" (Macnaught et al., 2013:55).

7.6 Contribution of this research

The contribution of this research constitutes a theoretical contribution to communication knowledge, as well as a number of practical contributions for the development of the new OM curriculum.

7.6.1 Knowledge contribution

This study has developed a theoretical framework, drawing on the dimensions of LCT (Maton, 2000) for the analysis of the knowledge base of office management work. The analysis, drawing on the dimension of Autonomy of LCT, has shown who decided on the knowledge bases of both the current and new OM curricula. The Semantic code of LCT has enabled the analysis of the knowledge areas drawn on in the development of the OM curricula and the Specialisation code of LCT has enabled the identification of the attributes necessary for the role of office administrators and office managers. This analysis has identified the "blind spots" of the curriculum designers of the OM curricula. This thesis advances a corrective to the lack of seriousness with which the work of office administrators has been taken in the past and aims to raise the level of debate and research into this field of practice.

This study has shown that the OM curricula give more prominence to Business Applications and the technical aspects of communication than to the essential disciplinary knowledge base of communication studies. The demands of the workplace for "computer technology" knowledge and skills are given greater priority. The emphasis of Business Communication as the disciplinary foundation of the curricula is powerful knowledge for graduates as it will provide them with the complex knowledge they will need to respond to the changing technology, dynamic workplace, and society. It is incumbent on the OM curriculum to provide access to disciplinary knowledge (Winberg et al., 2012:2) to support the knowledge base of OM work which is that of professional service and support. It is the critical relationship "that students develop with knowledge" that makes a higher education qualification (Ashwin, 2014:123). The knowledge bases selected for the OM curricula would therefore play a vital role in transforming the consciousness and identity of the graduates and enhancing their employability prospects.

7.6.2 Contribution to the recurriculation process

This research project has contributed to the recurriculation process of the new OM curriculum. The feedback from the Delphi panel, research undertaken at international institutions and interviews was shared with the academics of the OM Department, who were informed of the feedback which impacted on their individual subject areas as well as on the programme as a whole. Presentations of these findings over a period of five years were made at department meetings and allowed for discussion and debate. Much of the feedback was addressed in the proposed new OM curriculum, but there are some areas that still require attention. Further recommendations will be made to the recurriculation committee for possible changes to the new curriculum and Advanced Diploma.

7.6.3 Development of research methodology

This project aimed to expand on the Delphi method in two ways. Firstly, to reconsider the traditional Delphi view of "expert", as the Delphi panel of experts included not only employers, but also graduates of the OM curriculum. Secondly, the project aimed to expand on the requirements of the Delphi method regarding the issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The traditional Delphi method requires that the anonymity of the participants of the expert panel be guaranteed (Fraser, 1999:497). Some participants who had queries were able to meet with the researcher to clarify issues of concern. This facilitated the process of consensus.

7.6.4 Practical contribution

The implementation of the recommendations with regard to the framework for the ideal disciplinary base for the OM curricula in section 7.5.2 would benefit the development of the new OM curriculum and possibly the development of the Advanced Diploma. The findings of this research provide an understanding of the knowledge base of the OM curriculum and the identification of its organising principles and various knowledge forms, as well as their influence on knowledge building and student accomplishments. Guidelines are provided for the curricular arrangement for the educating of office administrators in preparation for current and future workplaces. The feedback from this research project encourages a review of the knowledge bases of the new OM curricula, as well as regular reviews, so that current habits are not propagated in the development of new curricula. This is highlighted in the report by the South African Council of Higher Education (CHE), which suggests that:

> At a minimum, there must be regular reviews of what constitutes the irreducible core of a curriculum. The working groups regard it as essential to incorporate developmental provision that supports the learning of core disciplinary knowledge. Such provision will vary in form by subject

area (for example, from language to contextual or conceptual knowledge development) and may be needed at different levels of the curriculum, but the common factor is that it is an essential means of enabling a large proportion of the student body not only to complete their studies but also to gain genuine mastery of their fields (CHE, 2013b:117).

7.7 Suggestions for further research

Continuous curriculum evaluation is imperative to ensure that quality assurance in higher education is maintained. The analysis of the current curriculum and the proposed new curriculum can inform the revision of OM curricula in the future. Further to this study, I suggest that future research should include the following questions:

What are the implications of these findings for the training of office managers?

How do universities of technology ensure that the demands of the field of practice are heeded but also balanced with the necessity for a strong disciplinary core for the curricula?

How does the OM Department ensure that the forms of pedagogy utilised for the training of office administrators and office managers contribute to the development of professional identity?

What measures need to be undertaken to embrace the uncertain future and to move forward to ensure the development of the strong disciplinary core of Business Communication for the OM curriculum?

What training do Communication academics require to ensure that they remain up-to-date with workplace communication practices so that they are able to prepare students for the current and future workplace?

7.8 Closing comments

The use of the legitimation dimensions of LCT at the centre of this thesis has enabled the analysis of the current and new OM curricula to determine the knowledge base of OM work. Knowledge is considered a fundamental element of modern societies and therefore the knowledge foundation selected for the OM curricula is envisaged to play a significant role in fostering the employability of graduates. The utilisation of the LCT conceptual tools of analysis, namely, the dimensions of Autonomy, Semantics and Specialisation, has enabled the identification of the knowledge bases of the OM curricula, its forms, and effects on the graduates and employers of OM graduates. It provided the means of identification of evidence of "knowledge blindness" (Maton, 2014:3) of the designers of the OM curriculum, allowing for the recognition of what needs to be changed to ensure OM curricula provide students with the disciplinary knowledge that underpins professional practice.

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Appendix A: Information Administration Core Syllabi

INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION I	INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION II	INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION III
SAPSE CODE: 060205612 ITS CODE: IAD111C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JAN 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION	SAPSE CODE: 060205722 ITS CODE: IAD210C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JAN 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION I ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS	SAPSE CODE: 060205803 ITS CODE: IAD310C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION II ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS
ROLE OF TEXT AND DATA PROCESSING IN OFFICE ADMINISTRATION A broad outline incorporating the various technologies	INFORMATION PROCESSING TECHNOLOGY: specific	MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY The management role in the automated office The total management support philosophy Benefits of the management support approach Management principles and responsibilities
HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE Types of computers Hardware components Peripherals Software Computer pitfalls (including viruses)	THE E-AGE	MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS Concepts An MIS orientation Planning/Organisation/Control/Decision-Making
FLOW OF INFORMATION Origination Input Processing/Production Output/Reproduction Storage and retrieval of information Distribution and communication of information	ASSESSMENT OF USER REQUIREMENTS	EVALUATION OF HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE Steps and guidelines Selection criteria and checklists Cost/Financing/Budgeting
COMPUTER APPLICATIONS Windows management Email and the Internet Production (10-15 wpm) Word Processing	SOFTWARE: Advanced text processing/Software: Advanced data capturing Pastel Word Processing: Intermediate Spreadsheets: Intermediate Production 25-30 wpm	IN-HOUSE TRAINING vs. CONSULTANCY SERVICES Benefits Training needs Training methods and curricula Cost Factors influencing training Evaluation
CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF EQUIPMENT Equipment, disks, supplies for care of equipment Maintenance contracts, including third party maintenance	SYSTEMS AND SOFTWARE configuration	NETWORKS Theoretical aspects Practical network applications
SYSTEMS APPROACH Definition of systems Systems approach: controlling, organising, co-ordinating and directing Electronic integration	COMPUTER SECURITY	APPLICATIONS Integration of applications Database applications Practical accounting
COMPUTER APPLICATIONS Windows management Production (15-25 wpm) Word Processing Introduction to data capturing: basic spread sheeting.	TRAINING Software: Advanced text processing/Software: Advanced data capturing Pastel Word Processing: Advanced Spreadsheets: Advanced Presentations Production 30–35 wpm	SOFTWARE Software is upgraded on a continuous basis to provide for technological changes Software applications are evaluated by means of at least three office simulations which contribute 40% towards the course mark

Appendix B: Business Administration Core Syllabi

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION I	BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION II	BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION III
SAPSE CODE: 040214612 ITS CODE: BUA111C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: None BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION I ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION	SAPSE CODE: 040214722 ITS CODE: BUA211C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION II ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION	SAPSE CODE: 040215703 ITS CODE: BUA311C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION II ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION
ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES	MANAGEMENT FUNCTION	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
BUSINESS SECTORS	OFFICE MANAGEMENT Definition Requirements for information Competency of the challenges for office manager Office management activities	Human resource provisioning Human being as employee Human resource planning Recruitment Selection Placement and induction Career management Human resource development Employee training
THE ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTION	THE OFFICE Physical environment Office layout and space utilisation Ergonomics Automation in the office Safety and security	OFFICE SUPERVISION The office manager/supervisor Office and office personnel problems Productivity enhancement
OFFICE PROCEDURE AND DUTIES	ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES Organisation of seminars, symposia and conferences Planning and arrangement of business trips	LABOUR RELATIONS Role players Common law Basic Conditions of Employment Act Occupational safety and health Labour Relations Act Collective bargaining Grievance procedures Disciplinary procedures
POST AND TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES	OFFICE ORGANISATION Formal and informal Basis for division of work Work simplification	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
FINANCING	SYSTEMS DESIGN AND ANALYSIS Office systems Records management and retention	EVALUATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS
FINANCIAL OFFICE PROCEDURES	CONTROL OF OFFICE ACTIVITIES Measurement of office activities Control and standardisation General control measures Quality and quantity control	
INSURANCE	ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES Forms design and layout Compilation of office and procedure manuals	

Appendix C: Communication Core Syllabi

COMMUNICATION I	COMMUNICATION II
SAPSE CODE: 059900512 ITS CODE: KOI11SC DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2004 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE CONTINUOUS EVALUATION: Continuous	SAPSE CODE: 059900622 ITS CODE: KOI210C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2004 PREREQUISITEOFFERING: COMMUNICATION I CONTINUOUS EVALUATION: A Minimum of three tests, written assignments and oral presentations
COMMUNICATION PROCESS Definitions, Models, Components	GROUP COMMUNICATION
BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	CONFLICT RESOLUTION, NEGOTIATION AND CUSTOMER RELATIONS
PERCEPTION	ADVANCED PUBLIC SPEAKING and visual aids
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION	ADVANCED WRITING SKILLS Business correspondence Report writing
SELF-CONCEPT	RESEARCH SKILLS Referencing
NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	INTERVIEWING
LISTENING SKILLS	
CONFLICT RESOLUTION	
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION Style in writing Summarising skills Short forms of communication Report writing Business correspondence	
MEETINGS Procedure Documentation	
PUBLIC SPEAKING	

Appendix D: Personnel Management Core Syllabus

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT I</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">SAPSE CODE: 60207406
ITS CODE: PEM112C
DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007
PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE
ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">

1.   BUSINESS PSYCHOLOGY AND HUMAN BEHAVIOUR
1.1   Foundations of business psychology
1.2   General principles of human behaviour
1.3   Individual differences and work performance

2.   DEALING WITH INDIVIDUALS
2.1   Achieving wellness and managing stress
2.2   Dealing with maladjusted and counter-productive employees
2.3   Managing conflict and frustration

3.   PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON THE JOB
3.1   Building relationships at work
3.2   Adjusting to the organisation

4.   DEALING WITH SMALL GROUPS
4.1   Exerting social influence
4.2   Working effectively within a group
4.3   Countering prejudice and discrimination

5.   HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: INTRODUCTION
5.1   Human resource management: nature and function
5.2   Status quo of human resource management in South Africa
5.3   Review of human resource functions in South Africa

</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix E: Financial Accounting Core Syllabus

<table>
<tr><td colspan="1">FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING I (FOR OM LEARNERS)</td></tr>
</table>

SAPSE CODE: 40109212
ITS CODE: FIA113C
DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007
PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE
ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS EVALUATION

1.INTRODUCTION TO ACCOUNTING
Financial Calculations
Definitions
The accounting equation
2.SUBSIDIARY JOURNALS
Cash Receipts
Cash Payments
Petty Cash
Creditors
Debtors
Wages and Salaries
3.LEDGER AND TRIAL BALANCE
Posting to the ledger
Extracts a trial balance
4.FIXED ASSETS
Depreciation and the valuation of fixed assets
Methods of depreciation
Scrapping and disposal of fixed assets
Fixed asset register
5.STOCK
Inventory valuation
Profit mark-up and profit margins
Stock losses
6.DEBTORS
Control accounts, list of debtors
Bad debts
Provision for bad debts
7.CREDITORS
Control accounts, list of creditors
Creditors reconciliation
8.BANK RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS
9.RESULTS OF OPERATIONS AND FINANCIAL POSITION
Adjustments, provisions and cut-offs
Generally accepted accounting practice
Financial statements: sole traders; [Income Statement and Balance Sheet]
10.ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Measures of comparison
Calculation of ratios
Deductions that can be made from financial statements
11.CLUBS AND NON-TRADING UNDERTAKINGS [INTRODUCTORY]
Receipts and payments statement
Income and expenditure account
Financial statements of clubs and non-trading concerns
12.BUDGETS AND BUDGETARY CONTROL
Emphasis on the Cash Budget

Appendix F: Legal Practice and Mercantile Law Core Syllabi

LEGAL PRACTICE I	LEGAL PRACTICE II
SAPSE CODE: 130303812 ITS CODE: LPR110C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS	SAPSE CODE: 130303922 ITS CODE: LPR210C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: LEGAL PRACTICE I ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS
CORE SYLLABUS 1.INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE LAW The concept law Sources of South African law Classification of South African law 2.THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE The constitutional framework and government departments The South African judiciary and the jurisdiction of the different courts The legal profession and its division Other legal personnel in the administration of justice Structure and the organisation of the legal practice with reference to forms of business ownership, organisational structures and personnel structures. 3.CIVIL LITIGATION Actions and applications Undefended actions Summonses and the issuing thereof Defence of an action and the pleadings that go with it Summary judgments Determination of a trial date and final preparation for a trial The trial and judgment by the court Ex parte applications Case studies 4. DEBT COLLECTIONS 4.1 Debt collecting claims 4.2 Section 56,57 and 58 procedures 4.3 Non-compliance with judgments 4.4 Execution of movable and immovable property 4.5 Section 65 procedures 4.6 Section 65(A) 1 trial 4.7 Garnishee orders 4.8 Emolument attachment orders 4.9 Case studies 5. CLOSE CORPORATIONS 5.1 Requirements for the registration of a close corporation 5.2 Case studies 6. BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO WILLS, CODICILS AND CONVEYANCING 6.1 Requirements for valid wills 6.2 Introduction to conveyancing 6.3 Case studies	*CORE SYLLABUS* 1.CONVEYANCING The law of conveyancing Real and limited real rights The conveyancer and Deeds Office staff The acquisition of property and transfer by sale Unusual transfers Sale of land on instalments Certificates of substituted title Subdivisions: Partitions transfers and townships Servitudes Sectional titles Mortgage bonds Miscellaneous 2.WILLS AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF ESTATES The law of intestate succession The law of testate succession and the Wills Act The Administration of Estates Act The most important people involved in the administration of estates The Master Office Reporting the estate and securing appointment of the Executor Duties of the Executor Taking control of and ascertaining the value of the estate Step before the drafting of the Liquidation and Distribution Account The Liquidation and Distribution Account Steps after the lodging of the Liquidation and Distribution Account The final distribution

MERCANTILE LAW	LABOUR AND IMMATERIAL PROPERTY LAW
SAPSE CODE: 130305412 ITS CODE: BUL111C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS	SAPSE CODE: 130305812 ITS CODE: LAI110C DATE FOR PHASING IN: JANUARY 2007 PREREQUISITE OFFERING: NONE ASSESSMENT: CONTINUOUS
CORE SYLLABUS *GENERAL PRINCIPLES* The concept "law" The sources of SA Law The administration of SA Law: Different courts and its application The SA Constitution and function of the Constitutional Court Requirements for a valid contract: Consensus Contractual capacity Lawfulness Possibility of performance Formalities Consequences of a void contract Parties to a contract Content of a contract Breach of contract Remedies for breach of contract Termination of contracts SPECIFIC CONTRACTS Contract of sale Credit Agreements Letting and hiring The common law contract of service Negotiable instruments	*CORE SYLLABUS* LABOUR LAW The parties to the employment relationship Common law contract of service Study of the following social legislation dealing with employment issues Basic Conditions of Employment Act Employment Equity Act Skills Development Act Occupational Health and Safety Act Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act Unemployment Insurance Act Labour Relations Act IMMATERIAL PROPERTY LAW Copyright Patents Trademarks Computer software, videos and advertising

Appendix G: OM Practical Core Syllabus

OFFICE MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY: OM PRACTICAL	
CODES:	MODULE A, IND101S MODULE B, IND102S
PERIODS:	JANUARY TO JUNE JULY TO DECEMBER

MODULE A	
TOPIC	**DESCRIPTION**
Introduction to OM Practical **Subject guide –** **Apply in classroom**	The aim of OM Practical and the importance thereof Responsibilities/ Expectations of Cooperative Education staff & Learner Learning areas/ Outcomes/ Assessments Assignments Attendance/ Consultation hours, etc.
Exercises – **Apply in classroom**	Compiling a Portfolio of Evidence Developing a Personal Profile Developing a Goal Plan Skills Inventory The Covering Letter & CV writing Profiling/ Self-awareness/ Research The Informational Interview/ Interviewing skills Job-hunting/ Networking skills Professionalism/ Telephone etiquette/ Work Ethics/ Behaviour in the workplace
Assignments	Portfolio of Evidence The Covering Letter & CV The Informational Interview / Profiling & Self-awareness / Mock Interview Test
Guest Lectures	Employers discuss their expectations/emphasise the importance of the CV as a marketing tool/ interviewing methods/ work ethics and behaviour in the workplace
Placement Process	An understanding of the CPUT's responsibility is created

MODULE B	
TOPIC	**DESCRIPTION**
Subject guide – **Apply in industry**	Responsibilities of Learner Learning areas/ Outcomes/ Assessments Assignments
Assignments	Submission of various forms Work Records Oral Presentation Portfolio/ Informational brochure/ Job description Project (research assignment) Competency Assessment

Appendix H: Consent Form

<div align="center">

Consent form

</div>

I, _____ give Ms Shairn Hollis-Turner permission to use my responses to the survey for scholarly research purposes.

I understand that those involved in this research project are intending to share their research in the form of scholarly publications and conference presentations.
I also understand that:

- Whether or not to give this permission is a personal decision, and it is entirely voluntary.
- I have the right to withdraw my permission at a later stage – so long as it is prior to any publication – and the researcher/s then refrain from including my story in their research.
- The researcher will use data for the purpose of this study only and not for any other purpose.
- My identity, the identity of my company or academic department, faculty and institution will be protected.

I hereby grant permission to use my interview data in the ways prescribed above.

Signed at _____ (Place) **on** _____ (Date)

…………………………………………………………..
Signature

_____
(Name)

PLEASE NOTE:
If you have any further queries in addition to what has been explained in the attached letter or the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact the research supervisor, Professor Chris Winberg.

Appendix I: Pilot Study Survey

Department of Office Management

OFFICE OF SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER

10 June 2010

Dear Participant

SURVEY: Employability of OM graduates

I am undertaking research in order to find out more about the employability of Office Management (OM) graduates. In order to achieve this, it is essential to include data from employers, academics and successful students. By participating in this research project, you will be assisting with the development of the OM syllabus as well as enhancing the employability/work readiness of OM graduates. Your responses to this survey will provide valuable information towards improving the OM course in ways that will foster the employability of OM graduates.

You are requested to give your permission by signing a consent form. Whether or not you give this permission, is entirely your personal decision, and it is entirely voluntary. You have a right to withdraw your permission at a later stage – so long as it is prior to any publication – and I would then refrain from including your data in the research. Your contributions are for the purpose of research only and not for any other purpose. Your confidentiality will be ensured through a number of mechanisms:

Pseudonyms may be provided when verbatim quotations are used for illustrative purposes in academic papers.

Background information that will make identification possible will not be included in any academic paper or public document.

Yours faithfully

SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER

Department of Office Management
Email: hollis-turners@CPUT.ac.za

SURVEY: Employability

Dear Participant

I am undertaking research in order to find out more about the employability of Office Management (OM) graduates and to include expert data from employers, academics and successful graduates in developing the OM syllabus and enhancing the work readiness of OM graduates. Your responses to this survey will provide valuable information towards improving the OM course in ways that foster the employability of OM graduates.

SECTION A: GENERAL

Are you an employer, academic or past graduate?...

SECTION B: PERSONAL DETAILS

What is name of the organisation at which you are employed?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………..
What is your position in the organisation?
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How long have you been employed in an office environment?
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What is your educational background?
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C. GRADUATE SKILLS

Rate the significance of the CRITICAL skills and understanding which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Critical Skills	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made			
2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community			
3. Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively			
4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information			
5. Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation			
6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others			
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation			
8. Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively			
9. Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities			
10. Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts			
11. Explore education and career opportunities			
12. Develop entrepreneurial opportunities			

Please list additional critical skills omitted in the above list.

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Rate the significance of the PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Personal Attributes	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Having honesty and integrity			
2. Being loyal			
3. Being committed			
4. Having enthusiasm			
5. Being reliable			
6. Possessing common sense			
7. Possessing a positive self-esteem			
8. Having a sense of humour			
9. Having a balanced attitude to work and home life			
10. Dealing with pressure			
11. Being motivated			
12. Being adaptable			
13. Personal presentation			

Please list additional PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES omitted on the list above.

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D. SUBJECT-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Rate the significance of the INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace. Tick the relevant columns.

Information Administration	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Software: Advanced text processing/Software: Advanced data capturing			
2. Hardware and software			
3. Pivot tables and charts			
4. Online forms			
5. Email and the internet			
6. MS Office suite			
7. Word Processing			
8. Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements			
9. Protection of documents			
10. Windows management			
11. Computer security			
12. Risk management: internet and network security			
13. MS PowerPoint: Advanced			
14. Management of information technology and systems			
15. Production 35 wpm			
16. Management decision-making			
17. Flow of information			
18. Networks			
19. MS Access			
20. VLookup and advanced filtering			
21. In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services			
22. Pastel			
23. MS Project			
24. Systems development			
25. Evaluation of hardware and software			

Please list additional INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION SKILLS omitted on the list above.
………..
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Rate the significance of the BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Business Administration	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Economic structures, principles and development			
2. Business sectors			
3. Management functions			
4. Administrative procedures			
5. The office: organisation and supervision			
6. Systems design and analysis			
7. Control of office activities			
8. Human resource management			
9. Labour relations			
10. Financial management			
11. Entrepreneurship			
12. Risk management			
13. Evaluation of administrative systems			
14. Strategic management			
15. Outsourcing management			

Please list additional BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills omitted on the list above.

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Rate the significance of the COMMUNICATION knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Communication knowledge and skills	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Oral communication and presentation skills			
2. Telephone technique			
3. Listening and conflict resolution skills			
4. Report writing			
5. Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes			
6. Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.			
7. CV writing and interviewing skills			
8. Organisational communication			
9. Proposals			
10. Intercultural communication			
11. Team work and small groups			
12. Goals and objectives			
13. Professional self-development			
14. Research: referencing skills			
15. Emails and facsimiles			
16. Communication theory			

Please list additional COMMUNICATION knowledge and skills omitted on the list above.

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Rate the significance of the PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Personnel Management	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Business psychology and human behaviour			
2. Dealing with individuals			
3. Personal relationships on the job			
4. Dealing with small groups			
5. Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace			
6. Resolving frustration and conflict			
7. Stress management			
8. Social and personal perception			
9. Human resource management: introduction			
10. Remuneration and remuneration models			

Please list additional PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT knowledge and skills omitted on the list above.

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Rate the significance of the FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Financial Accounting	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Introduction to accounting			
2. Subsidiary journals			
3. Ledger and trial balance			
4. Fixed assets			
5. Stock			
6. Debtors			
7. Creditors			
8. Bank reconciliation statements			
9. Results of operations and financial positions			
10. Analysis and interpretation of financial statements			
11. Clubs and non-trading undertakings (Introduction)			
12. Budgets and budgetary control			

Please list additional FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING knowledge and skills omitted on the list above.
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Rate the significance of the LEGAL PRACTICE and MERCANTILE LAW knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Legal Practice and Mercantile Law	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Introduction to the study of law			
2. The administration of justice			
3. Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation			
4. Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court			
5. Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court			
6. Close corporations			
7. Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates			
8. General principles of the law of contract			
9. Specific contracts			
10. Labour law			
11. Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents			

Please list additional LEGAL PRACTICE and MERCANTILE LAW knowledge and skills omitted on the list above.

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Rate the significance of the BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Office Administration Behavioural Aspects	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Behavioural aspects			
2. Project management			
3. Project, curriculum and portfolio selection			
4. Initiating projects			
5. Project integration, scope, time and cost			
6. Project quality: human resources, communication, risk and procurement management			
7. Executing projects			
8. Monitoring and controlling projects			
9. Closing projects and best practices			
Research Methodology	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
1. Research concepts			
2. Evaluation of research proposals			
3. Thesis production			

Please list additional PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY knowledge and skills omitted on the list above.

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 Do you think that a three-year Diploma in Office Management is adequate to ensure that graduates are ready for the workplace? Please motivate your answer.

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Please mention any general comments you may have.

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Thank you for taking the time and making the effort to complete this survey.

Department of Office Management

OFFICE OF SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER

22 September 2010

Dear Participant

SURVEY: Employability of OM graduates

I am undertaking research in order to find out about the employability of Office Management (OM) graduates. In order to achieve this, it is essential to include data from employers, academics and successful graduates. By participating in this research project, you will be assisting with the development of the OM syllabus as well as enhancing the employability/work readiness of OM graduates. Your responses to this survey will provide valuable information towards improving the OM course in ways that will foster the employability of OM graduates.

Your contributions are for the purpose of research only and not for any other purpose. Your confidentiality will be ensured through a number of mechanisms:

   Pseudonyms may be provided when verbatim quotations are used for illustrative purposes in academic papers.

   Background information that will make identification possible will not be included in any academic paper or public document.

Yours faithfully

SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER

Department of Office Management
Email: hollis-turners@CPUT.ac.za

SECTION A: GENERAL

Please tick the box (es) that apply to you.

Employer	Employee	Academic lecturer	Current OM student	OM graduate

SECTION B: PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Please tick the relevant box regarding your current position.

Currently studying	Currently unemployed	Employed/employer in an office environment	Academic in Higher Education

2. If your answer is that you are "currently unemployed" please explain your current status.

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3. Please tick the relevant box regarding your work environment.

Tourism and film production	Government	Retail	Service and production industry	Education	Other	N/A

4. If your answer is "other", please provide details.

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5. Please tick the relevant box regarding the number of years you have been engaged in the field of administration in the workplace.

1 – 3 years	4 – 6 years	7 – 10 years	11 or more years	N/A

6. What is your position at the organisation where you are or were last employed?

Employer	Management/ Supervisory	Office Administration	Other	N/A

7. What educational qualification do you currently hold, or are studying towards?

National Senior Certificate	Higher Education Diploma/Degree	Masters/ Doctorate	Trade qualification	Other

8. What is your home language?

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9. What is the primary language used at your workplace?

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C. EMPLOYABILITY/WORK READINESS SKILLS

Rate the significance of the following CRITICAL SKILLS and understanding which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace. Tick the relevant columns.

Critical Skills	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made			
2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community			
3. Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively			
4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information			
5. Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation			
6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others			
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation			
8. Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively			
9. Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities			
10. Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts			
11. Explore education and career opportunities			
12. Develop entrepreneurial opportunities			

Please list any additional CRITICAL SKILLS that you feel have been omitted from the list.

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Rate the significance of the following PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES that you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace. Tick the relevant columns.

Personal Attributes	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Applying knowledge to new situations			
2. Devising ways to improve on one's own actions			
3. Having honesty and integrity			
4. Being loyal and committed			
5. Having enthusiasm			
6. Being reliable			
7. Possessing common sense			
8. Possessing a positive self-esteem			
9. Having a sense of humour			
10. Having a balanced attitude to work and home life			
11. Dealing with pressure			
12. Being motivated			
13. Being adaptable			
14. Professional appearance			
15. Applying self-awareness and reflective practices			
16. Understanding of changing workplace situations			
17. Dealing with different cultural practices			

Please list additional PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES omitted from the list above.

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D. SUBJECT-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Rate the significance of the following INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace. Tick the relevant columns.

Information Administration	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Software: Advanced text processing/Software: Advanced data capturing			
2. Hardware and software			
3. Pivot tables and charts			
4. Online forms			
5. Email and the internet			
6. MS Office suite			
7. Word Processing			
8. Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements			
9. Protection of documents			
10. Windows management			
11. Computer security			
12. Risk management: internet and network security			
13. MS PowerPoint: Advanced			
14. Management of information technology and systems			
15. Production 35 wpm			
16. Management decision-making			
17. Flow of information			
18. Networks			
19. MS Access			
20. VLookup and advanced filtering			
21. In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services			
22. Pastel			
23. MS Project			
24. Systems development			
25. Evaluation of hardware and software			

Please list additional INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills omitted from the list above.

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Rate the significance of the following BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Business Administration	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Economic structures, principles and development			
2. Business sectors			
3. Management functions			
4. Administrative procedures			
5. The office: organisation and supervision			
6. Systems design and analysis			
7. Control of office activities			
8. Human resource management			
9. Labour relations			
10. Financial management			
11. Entrepreneurship			
12. Risk management			
13. Evaluation of administrative systems			
14. Strategic management			
15. Outsourcing management			

Please list additional BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills omitted from the list above.

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Rate the significance of the following COMMUNICATION knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace. Tick the relevant columns.

Communication knowledge and skills	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Oral communication and presentation skills			
2. Telephone technique			
3. Listening, and conflict resolution skills			
4. Report writing			
5. Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes			
6. Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.			
7. CV writing and interviewing skills			
8. Organisational communication			
9. Proposals			
10. Intercultural communication			
11. Team work and small groups			
12. Goals and objectives			
13. Professional self-development			
14. Research: referencing skills			
15. Emails and facsimiles			
16. Communication theory			

Please list additional COMMUNICATION knowledge and skills omitted from the list above.

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Rate the significance of the following PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Personnel Management	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Business psychology and human behaviour			
2. Dealing with individuals			
3. Personal relationships on the job			
4 Dealing with small groups			
5. Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace			
6. Resolving frustration and conflict			
7. Stress management			
8. Social and personal perception			
9. Human resource management: introduction			
10.Remuneration and remuneration models			

Please list additional PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT knowledge and skills omitted from the list above.

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Rate the significance of the following FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Financial Accounting	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Introduction to accounting			
2. Subsidiary journals			
3. Ledger and trial balance			
4. Fixed assets			
5. Stock			
6. Debtors			
7. Creditors			
8. Bank reconciliation statements			
9. Results of operations and financial positions			
10. Analysis and interpretation of financial statements			
11. Clubs and non-trading undertakings			
12. Budgets and budgetary control			

Please list additional FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING knowledge and skills omitted from the list above.

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Rate the significance of the following LEGAL PRACTICE and MERCANTILE LAW knowledge and skills which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace? Tick the relevant columns.

Legal Practice and Mercantile Law	Necessary	Essential	Critical
1. Introduction to the study of law			
2. The administration of justice			
3. Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation			
4. Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court			
5. Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court			
6. Close corporations			
7. Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates			
8. General principles of the law of contract			
9. Specific contracts			
10. Labour law			
11. Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents			

Please list additional LEGAL PRACTICE and MERCANTILE LAW knowledge and skills omitted from the list above.

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10. Do you think that a three-year Diploma in Office Management is adequate to ensure that graduates are ready for the workplace? Please motivate your answer.

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If your answer is "no" to the above question, please list the advantages of a Baccalaureus Technologiae (BTech) degree in OM?

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11.   General comments.

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Thank you for taking the time and making the effort to complete this survey.

Department of Office Management

OFFICE OF SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER

17 April 2011

Dear Panel Member

Thank you for responding to the "round one survey" regarding the employability of Office Management (OM) graduates.

Based on an analysis of the initial data from the round one of surveys, the responses were listed in the order of importance as indicated by the respondents. Attached is the list showing the overall responses in the order of importance, together with the additional items which panel members included under each section of the survey.

Please examine the list which serves to verify the responses made by panel members to the survey and mark with an "X" and specify next to any items which you feel are incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list. I would appreciate any other comments or suggestions you wish to make which may be added to the list. The confidentiality of your feedback is guaranteed. With your permission, you may be invited to follow up interviews if clarity is required regarding ambiguous issues.

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated and will provide academics with an opportunity to make improvements to the OM syllabi in order to foster the employability of the OM graduates.

I look forward to your responses.

Yours faithfully

Shairn Hollis-Turner

Department of Office Management
Email: hollis-turners@CPUT.ac.za

OVERALL RATINGS OF IMPORTANCE FOR ROUND ONE SURVEY	
C. EMPLOYABILITY/WORK READINESS SKILLS	
The high to low ratings of importance for CRITICAL SKILLS and additional items	**Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list**
Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively	
Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community	
Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation	
Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made	
Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information	
Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts	
Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others	
Explore education and career opportunities	
Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation	
Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively	
Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities	
Develop entrepreneurial opportunities	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Self-motivation	
Person to be compatible with company ethics	
Being able to work under stress	
Being able to embrace diversity in a workplace	
Multi-tasking	
To communicate and build relationships with similar or related organisations i.e. networking	
Numeric accuracy	
Analyse team members e.g. use Meyers, Briggs characteristics to optimise synergistic contribution	
Control and feedback of task progress	
Life skills – behaviour and attitudes	
Strategic evaluation and planning skills	

The high to low ratings of importance for PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
Being reliable	
Having honesty and integrity	
Being loyal and committed	
Dealing with pressure	
Being adaptable	
Being motivated	
Having enthusiasm	
Possessing common sense	
Applying self-awareness and reflective practices	
Having a balanced attitude to work and home life	
Applying knowledge to new situations	
Dealing with different cultural practices	
Understanding of changing workplace situations	
Possessing a positive self-esteem	
Devising ways to improve on one's own actions	
Having a sense of humour	
Professional appearance	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Not allowing personal problems to interfere with work	
Ability to resolve/ address conflict in the workplace	
Tolerance and diplomacy	
Creativity and innovativeness	
Using one's own intuition: to think and work on one's own	
Having self-confidence	
High level of emotional intelligence/control	
Go the extra mile and do more than what's expected	
Persistence	
Punctuality	
Flexibility	
Maturity	
A positive attitude	
Empathy for "plight" of stress	
Communicate with top level executives	

The high to low ratings of importance for Information Administration knowledge and skills and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
Email and the internet	
MS Office suite	
Word Processing	
Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements	
Protection of documents	
Windows management	
Computer security	
Risk management: internet and network security	
MS PowerPoint: Advanced	
Management of information technology and systems	
Production 35 wpm	
Management decision making	
Flow of information	
Hardware and software	
Software: Advanced text processing/Software:	
Pivot tables and charts	
Online forms	
MS Access	
Networks	
In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services	
Pastel	
MS Project	
Systems development	
VLookup and advanced filtering	
Evaluation of hardware and software	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
SAP – Systems Application Programming	
Legal software such as "Ghost Convey"	
Pastel payroll	
MS Visio for business process modelling	
Ability to identify the different types of hardware/ software or being able to identify the computer security threats that exist	
Online design and development of information, graphs and pictures	
How to use online customer relationship management software (CRM)	
Advance skills on Excel	
Back-up procedures and software	
Password setting etc.	
Structuring a document management storage systems	
MS Publisher	

The high to low ratings of importance for BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
The office: organisation and supervision	
Administrative procedures	
Control of office activities	
Management functions	
Financial management	
Human resource management	
Evaluation of administrative systems	
Systems design and analysis	
Strategic management	
Risk management	
Business sectors	
Labour relations	
Economic structures, principles and development	
Entrepreneurship	
Outsourcing management	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Marketing and research	
Understand the critical importance of administration as one of the pillars in any organization	
Time management	
Business processes - (Systems Application Curriculum)	
Integrated Project Management Skills.	
Process improvement methodologies and skills	
Change management skills	
Practical aspects of supply chain management	
Understanding the ergonomic environment	
Understanding workplace safety and security issues	
Knowledge of company policies and procedures	
Knowledge of forms design	
Knowledge of planning, executing and reviewing events such as meetings, travel arrangements, workshops etc.	
Marketing	
Project management	
Feedback part of risks and control	

The high to low ratings of importance for COMMUNICATION knowledge and skills and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
Oral communication and presentation skills	
Listening skills and conflict resolution	
Teamwork and small groups	
Telephone technique	
Intercultural communication	
Organisational communication	
Goals and objectives	
Emails and facsimiles	
Professional self-development	
Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes	
Report writing	
Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.	
Research: referencing skills	
CV writing and interviewing skills	
Proposals	
Communication theory	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Conference calls	
Correct written language usage	
Documentation etiquette	
Understanding English language and application	
Formulating project work charters at a more senior level	
Knowledge of a business case at a more senior level	
Sending announcements	
Making calendar entries	
Facilitation (workshops)	
Control of one's emotions	
Website communication – Facebook, Twitter and other digital forms of communication	
Proficiency in at least two official languages	
Brochures and posters	

The high to low ratings of importance for PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT knowledge and skills and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
Resolving frustration and conflict	
Stress management	
Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace	
Dealing with individuals	
Personal relationships on the job	
Business psychology and human behaviour	
Dealing with small groups	
Human resource management: introduction	
Social and personal perception	
Remuneration and remuneration models	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Performance measures and tracking using KPIs to report to management	
To conduct individual assessments at the beginning of the students' first year	
Student to gain understanding of subject matter	
Monitor students' growth and development	
Emotional intelligence	
Interviewing candidates for positions	
Drafting of job description	
Organisation and storage of personnel data	
Performance management	
Performance appraisal	
Personal development	
Upholding confidentiality	
Knowledge of labours laws and disciplinary procedures	
Understanding of organisational culture	

The high to low ratings of importance for FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING knowledge and skills and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
Budgets and budgetary control	
Introduction to accounting	
Analysis and interpretation of financial statements	
Bank reconciliation statements	
Debtors	
Creditors	
Ledger and trial balance	
Stock	
Subsidiary journals	
Fixed assets	
Results of operations and financial positions	
Clubs and non-trading undertakings	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Understanding monthly requisitions – to form part of budgets	
Costing and financial modelling at a more senior level	
Income statement	
Bank interface exception reports	
Cash flow management to balance sheet	
How to read a balance sheet and profit and loss account	
Legislation and financial policies	
Petty cash management	

The high to low ratings of importance for LEGAL PRACTICE AND MERCANTILE LAW knowledge and skills and additional items	Mark with an "X" and specify if an item is incorrectly rated or should be removed from the list
Labour law	
General principles of the law of contract	
Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents	
Specific contracts	
The administration of justice	
Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation	
Introduction to the study of law	
Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court	
Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates	
Close corporations	
Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court	
Additional items not ranked in order of importance	
Business law in order to be equipped to start own businesses	
Knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment	

10 July 2011

Dear Panel Member

Round Two Survey

Thank you for responding to the "round one surveys" regarding the employability of Office Management (OM) graduates.

Based on an analysis of the initial data from the round one of surveys, the responses were listed in the order of importance as indicated by the respondents. Attached is the second round survey for your confirmation and to rate the present and additional items in order of importance by marking with an "X" next to any items which you feel necessary, essential or critical to the success of the graduate in the workplace. I would appreciate any other comments or suggestions regarding items which you may feel should be added to the list.

The confidentiality of your feedback is guaranteed. With your permission, you may be invited to follow-up interviews or a curriculum workshop if clarity is required regarding ambiguous issues.

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated and will provide academics with an opportunity to make improvements to the OM syllabi in order to foster the employability of the OM graduates.

I look forward to your responses.

Yours faithfully

SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER
Department of Office Management
Email: hollis-turners@CPUT.ac.za

ROUND TWO SURVEYS: Employability of OM graduates

EMPLOYABILITY/WORK READINESS SKILLS

Rate the significance of the following skills and understanding which you consider critical for OM graduates to foster employability in the workplace. Please tick the relevant columns.

EMPLOYABILITY/WORK READINESS SKILLS			
The high to low ratings of importance for CRITICAL SKILLS and additional items	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively			
Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community			
Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation			
Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made			
Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information			
Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts			
Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others			
Explore education and career opportunities			
Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation			
Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively			
Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities			
Develop entrepreneurial opportunities			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Self-motivation			
Person to be compatible with company ethics			
Being able to work under stress			
Being able to embrace diversity in a workplace			
Multi-tasking			
To communicate and build relationships with similar or related organisations i.e. networking			
Numeric accuracy			
Analyse team members e.g. use Meyers, Briggs characteristics to optimise synergistic contribution			
Control and feedback of task progress			
Life skills – behaviour and attitudes			
Strategic evaluation and planning skills			

The high to low ratings of importance for PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
Being reliable			
Having honesty and integrity			
Being loyal and committed			
Dealing with pressure			
Being adaptable			
Being motivated			
Having enthusiasm			
Possessing common sense			
Applying self-awareness and reflective practices			
Having a balanced attitude to work and home life			
Applying knowledge to new situations			
Dealing with different cultural practices			
Understanding of changing workplace situations			
Possessing a positive self-esteem			
Devising ways to improve on one's own actions			
Having a sense of humour			
Professional appearance			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Not allowing personal problems to interfere with work			
Ability to resolve/ address conflict in the workplace			
Tolerance and diplomacy			
Creativity and innovativeness			
Using one's own intuition to think and work on one's own			
Having self-confidence			
High level of emotional intelligence/control			
Go the extra mile and do more than what's expected			
Persistence			
Punctuality			
Flexibility			
Maturity			
A positive attitude			
Empathy for "plight" of stress			
Communicate with top level executives			

SUBJECT- SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS			
The high to low ratings of importance for INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
Email and the internet			
MS Office suite			
Word Processing			
Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements			
Protection of documents			
Windows management			
Computer security			
Risk management: internet and network security			
MS PowerPoint: Advanced			
Management of information technology and systems			
Production 35 wpm			
Management decision-making			
Flow of information			
Hardware and software			
Software: Advanced text processing/Software:			
Pivot tables and charts			
Online forms			
MS Access			
Networks			
In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services			
Pastel			
MS Project			
Systems development			
VLookup and advanced filtering			
Evaluation of hardware and software			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	Necessary	Essential	Critical
SAP – Systems Application Programming			
Legal software such as "Ghost Convey"			
Pastel payroll			
MSVisio for business process modelling			
Ability to identify the different types of hardware/ software or being able to identify the computer security threats that exist			
Online design and development of information, graphs and pictures			
How to use online customer relationship management software (CRM)			
Advance skills on Excel			
Back-up procedures and software			
Password setting etc.			
Structuring a document management storage systems			
MS Publisher			

The high to low ratings of importance for BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION knowledge and skills and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
The office: organisation and supervision			
Administrative procedures			
Control of office activities			
Management functions			
Financial management			
Human resource management			
Evaluation of administrative systems			
Systems design and analysis			
Strategic management			
Risk management			
Business sectors			
Labour relations			
Economic structures, principles and development			
Entrepreneurship			
Outsourcing management			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Marketing and research			
Understand the critical importance of administration as one of the pillars in any organization			
Time management			
Business processes – (Systems Application Curriculum)			
Integrated project management skills			
Process improvement methodologies and skills			
Change management skills			
Practical aspects of supply chain management			
Understanding the ergonomic environment			
Understanding workplace safety and security issues			
Knowledge of company policies and procedures			
Knowledge of forms design			
Knowledge of planning, executing and reviewing events such as meetings, travel arrangements, workshops etc.			
Marketing			
Project management			
Feedback part of risks and control			

The high to low ratings of importance for COMMUNICATION knowledge and skills and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
Oral communication and presentation skills			
Listening skills and conflict resolution			
Teamwork and small groups			
Telephone technique			
Intercultural communication			
Organisational communication			
Goals and objectives			
Emails and facsimiles			
Professional self-development			
Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes			
Report writing			
Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.			
Research: referencing skills			
CV writing and interviewing skills			
Proposals			
Communication theory			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Conference calls			
Correct written language usage			
Documentation etiquette			
Understanding English language and application			
Formulating project work charters at a more senior level			
Knowledge of a business case at a more senior level			
Sending announcements			
Making calendar entries			
Facilitation (workshops)			
Control of one's emotions			
Website communication – Facebook, Twitter and other digital forms of communication			
Proficiency in at least two official languages			
Brochures and posters			

The high to low ratings of importance for PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT knowledge and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
Resolving frustration and conflict			
Stress management			
Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace			
Dealing with individuals			
Personal relationships on the job			
Business psychology and human behaviour			
Dealing with small groups			
Human resource management: introduction			
Social and personal perception			
Remuneration and remuneration models			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Performance measures and tracking using KPIs to report to management			
To conduct individual assessments at the beginning of the students' first year			
Student to gain understanding of subject matter			
Monitor students' growth and development			
Emotional intelligence			
Interviewing candidates for positions			
Drafting of job description			
Organisation and storage of personnel data			
Performance management			
Performance appraisal			
Personal development			
Upholding confidentiality			
Knowledge of labours laws and disciplinary procedures			
Understanding of organisational culture			

The high to low ratings of importance for FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING knowledge and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
Budgets and budgetary control			
Introduction to accounting			
Analysis and interpretation of financial statements			
Bank reconciliation statements			
Debtors			
Creditors			
Ledger and trial balance			
Stock			
Subsidiary journals			
Fixed assets			
Results of operations and financial positions			
Clubs and non-trading undertakings			
Additional items to be ranked necessary/essential/critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Understanding monthly requisitions – to form part of budgets			
Costing and financial modelling at a more senior level			
Income statement			
Bank interface exception reports			
Cash flow management to balance sheet			
How to read a balance sheet and profit and loss account			
Legislation and financial policies			
Petty cash management			

The high to low ratings of importance for LEGAL PRACTICE AND MERCANTILE LAW knowledge and skills and additional items	Necessary	Essential	Critical
Labour law			
General principles of the law of contract			
Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents			
Specific contracts			
The administration of justice			
Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation			
Introduction to the study of law			
Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court			
Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates			
Close corporations			
Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court			
Additional items to be ranked necessary, essential or critical	**Necessary**	**Essential**	**Critical**
Business law in order to be equipped to start own businesses			
Knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment			

Thank you for taking the time and making the effort to respond to the round two survey. Please include any other comments relating to the employability of OM graduates on the sheet below.

General Comments:

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Appendix M: Round Two Verification and Round Three Survey

27 January 2012

Dear Panel Member

Second Round Verification and Final Survey

Thank you for responding to the "second round survey" regarding the employability of Office Management (OM) graduates.

Based on an analysis of the data from the second round of surveys, the responses were listed in the order of importance as indicated by the respondents. Attached is the list showing the overall responses in the order of importance of those items critical to the success of the graduate.

Please examine the list which serves to verify the responses made by panel members to the survey and confirm your satisfaction with the results, alternatively if necessary, please mark with an X and comment on any changes to your responses. These results serve as the final round survey and therefore I would appreciate any other comments or suggestions you wish to make which may be added to the list.

The confidentiality of your feedback is guaranteed. With your permission, you may be invited to follow-up interviews or curriculum workshop discussions if clarity is required regarding ambiguous issues.

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated and will provide academics with an opportunity to make improvements to the OM syllabi in order to foster the employability of the OM graduates.

I look forward to your responses.

Yours faithfully

SHAIRN HOLLIS-TURNER
Department of Office Management
Email: hollis-turners@CPUT.ac.za

The final consensus ratings for Critical Skills which are critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively	91%	
Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community	75%	
Multi-Tasking	68%	
Self-motivation	68%	
Being able to work under stress	67%	
Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation	66%	
Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information	56%	
Life skills, behaviour and attitudes	56%	
Being able to embrace diversity in the workplace	53%	
Person to be compatible with company ethics	51%	
Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions with critical and creative thinking have been made	49%	
Control and feedback of task progress	42%	
Strategic evaluation and planning	38%	
Numeric accuracy	36%	
Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation	27%	
Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts	25%	
Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively	24%	
To communicate and build relationships with similar or related organisations i.e. networking	24%	
Explore education and career opportunities	18%	
Develop entrepreneurial opportunities	15%	
Analyse team members e.g. use Meyers, Briggs characteristics to optimise synergistic contribution	14%	
Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others	12%	
Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities	8%	

The final consensus ratings for Personal Attributes critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Having honesty and integrity	88%	
Being reliable	82%	
Being loyal and committed	74%	
Using one's own intuition: to think and work on one's own	74%	
Punctuality	68%	
Being motivated	63%	
Being adaptable	61%	
Possessing common sense	59%	
Having self-confidence	58%	
Dealing with pressure	57%	
Go the extra mile and do more than what's expected	57%	
A positive attitude	56%	
Possessing a positive self-esteem	56%	
Applying knowledge to new situations	53%	
Flexibility	48%	
Having enthusiasm	47%	
Creativity and innovativeness	47%	
Ability to resolve/address conflict in the workplace	46%	
Maturity	46%	
Not allowing personal problems to interfere with work	44%	
Persistence	42%	
Having a balanced attitude to work and home life	40%	
Communicate with top level executives	38%	
Tolerance and diplomacy	38%	
High level of emotional intelligence/control	38%	
Understanding of changing workplace situations	36%	
Professional appearance	34%	
Applying self-awareness and reflective practices	32%	
Dealing with different cultural practices	29%	
Devising ways to improve on one's own action	29%	
Having a sense of humour	20%	
Empathy for "plight" of stress	5%	

The final consensus ratings for Information Administration knowledge and skills critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
MS Office suite	81%	
Word processing	74%	
Emails and the Internet	68%	
Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements	57%	
Protection of documentation	57%	
Windows management	44%	
MS PowerPoint: Advanced	41%	
Advanced skills on Excel	40%	
Computer security	39%	
Back-up procedures and software	36%	
Flow of information	36%	
Management of Information technology and systems	30%	
Structuring a document management system	29%	
Management decision making	29%	
Ability to identify different types of hardware/software or being able to identify computer security threats	27%	
Risk management: internet and network security	27%	
Production 35wpm	26%	
Online forms	22%	
In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services	22%	
Password setting etc.	22%	
VLookup and advanced filtering	19%	
Software: Advanced text processing/Software: advanced data capturing	18%	
Systems development	18%	
Pastel	15%	
Networks	15%	
Hardware and software	14%	
Online design and development of information, graphs and pictures	14%	
MS Project	13%	
MS Publisher	13%	
Pivot tables and charts	12%	
SAP - Systems Application Programming	12%	
How to use online customer relationship management software (CRM)	11%	
Pastel payroll	11%	
MS Access	10%	
Evaluation of hardware and software	9%	
Legal software such as "Ghost Convey"	5%	
MS Visio for business process modelling	5%	

The final consensus ratings for Business Administration knowledge and skills critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Time management	89%	
Understand the critical importance of administration as one of the pillars in any organization	73%	
Administrative procedures	73%	
Control of office activities	57%	
Knowledge of company policies and procedures	53%	
The Office: organisation and supervision	49%	
Human resource management	46%	
Evaluation of administrative systems	44%	
Knowledge of planning, executing and reviewing events such as meetings, travel arrangements, workshops etc.	42%	
Financial management	42%	
Understanding workplace safety and security issues	37%	
Management functions	36%	
Labour relations	33%	
Strategic management	29%	
Project management	29%	
Risk management	27%	
Systems design and analysis	24%	
Marketing and research	22%	
Entrepreneurship	20%	
Business sectors	20%	
Integrated project management skills	18%	
Change management skills	18%	
Knowledge of forms design	18%	
Business processes - (Systems Application Curriculum)	15%	
Understanding the ergonomic environment	12%	
Process improvement methodologies and skills	11%	
Feedback part of risks and control	10%	
Economic structures, principles and development	6%	
Marketing	6%	
Outsourcing management	5%	
Practical aspects of supply chain management	0%	

The final consensus ratings for Communication knowledge and skills critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Correct written language	77%	
Understanding English Language and application	71%	
Documentation etiquette	71%	
Teamwork and small groups	70%	
Listening skills and conflict resolution	64%	
Oral communication and presentation skills	63%	
Control of one's emotions	52%	
Goals and objectives	50%	
Telephone technique	45%	
Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.	43%	
Emails and facsimiles	42%	
Proficiency in at least two official languages	42%	
Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes	38%	
CV writing and interview skills	35%	
Report writing	33%	
Intercultural communication	32%	
Organisational communication	32%	
Proposals	32%	
Professional self-development	31%	
Website communication – Facebook, Twitter and other digital forms of communication	29%	
Research: referencing skills	29%	
Making calendar entries	26%	
Formulating project work charters at a more senior level	23%	
Knowledge of a business case at a more senior level	21%	
Brochures and posters	19%	
Sending announcements	16%	
Facilitation (workshops)	13%	
Communication theory	11%	
Conference calls	10%	

The final consensus ratings for Personnel Management knowledge and skills critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Upholding confidentiality	80%	
Dealing with individuals	77%	
Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace	62%	
Understanding of organisational culture	61%	
Stress management	54%	
Personal relationships on the job	52%	
Knowledge of labour laws and disciplinary procedures	50%	
Emotional intelligence	47%	
Personal development	45%	
Resolving frustration and conflict	43%	
Business psychology and human behaviour	42%	
Monitor students' growth and development	39%	
Dealing with small groups	37%	
Human resource management: introduction	30%	
Social and personal perception	30%	
Students to gain understanding of subject matter	29%	
Performance measures and tracking using KPIs to report to management	29%	
Performance appraisal	28%	
Organisation and storage of personnel data	26%	
Remuneration and remuneration models	26%	
Performance management	22%	
Drafting of job description	19%	
Interviewing candidates for positions	14%	
To conduct individual assessments at the beginning of the students' first year	12%	

The final consensus ratings for Financial Management knowledge and skills critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Budgets and budgetary control	60%	
How to read a balance sheet and profit and loss accounts	56%	
Results of operations and financial positions	47%	
Introduction to accounting	45%	
Legislation and financial policies	45%	
Analysis and interpretation of financial statements	42%	
Understanding monthly requisitions - to form part of budgets	42%	
Petty cash management	39%	
Income statement	39%	
Stock	37%	
Debtors	36%	
Creditors	36%	
Bank reconciliation statements	31%	
Ledger and trial balance	31%	
Fixed assets	31%	
Cash flow management to balance sheet	31%	
Subsidiary journals	25%	
Costing and financial modelling at a more senior level	22%	
Bank interface exception reports	17%	
Clubs and non-trading undertakings	11%	

The final consensus ratings for Legal Practice and Mercantile Law knowledge and skills critical to enhancing the employability of graduates	Consensus	Mark with an " X" and specify if any item is incorrectly rated
Knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment	68%	
Labour law	48%	
General principles of the law of contract	43%	
Business law in order to be equipped to start own business	43%	
Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents	32%	
Specific contracts	28%	
The administration of justice	24%	
Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation	24%	
Introduction to the study of law	20%	
Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court	20%	
Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates	20%	
Close corporations	19%	
Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court	16%	

Please include any other comments relating to the employability of OM graduates below.

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Thank you for taking the time and making the effort to complete this survey.

Appendix N: Alumni Survey

Dear Alumnus

We are currently revising our diploma to make them more responsive to the workplace environment. The purpose of this survey is to find out about the Diploma in OM and its relevance to the workplace. Please tick (✓) the appropriate column or fill in the required details. Your input is important to us and will be treated with the strictest confidence.

State your qualification(s), institution and the year of graduation.

Qualification obtained	Institution obtained	Year obtained
NATIONAL DIPLOMA:		
BTech: OM		

Other:

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Tick the current industry in which you are employed and the position you currently hold (Please add any if other choices are not on the list).

Current Industry	(✓)	2.2 Current Position	(✓)
Manufacturing		Administrative Assistant	
Wholesale and retail trade		Administrative Supervisor	
Financial institution		Administrative Manager	
Hospitality Industry		Store Manager	
Print and paper Industry		Head of Department	
Public Administration			
Education			
Marketing and Advertising			
Medical			

Other: …………………………………………………………….   Other:

...…………………………………………………………..

Tick (✓) the tasks that you are able to perform / need assistance / or cannot perform in your current position (Please add any if other choices are not on the list).

Task	Able to perform	Need assistance	Unable to perform
Chair a meeting			
Take minutes at a meeting			
Respond to clients' queries			
Make and receive calls with clients successfully			
Make and receive calls with colleagues successfully			
Do presentations			
Use a word processing or any other processing package as required for your position			
Use a spreadsheet package as required for your position			
Use a presentation package as required for your position			
Plan and write concise correspondence, e.g. emails, faxes, memos			
Plan and write reports			

Other:

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Tick (✓) the workplace skills /attributes that are essential / required or / not required in your current position (Please add any if other choices are not on the list).

Skills/Attributes	Essential	Required	Not required
Work as part of a team			
Work on your own/independently			
Deal with workplace stress			
Manage conflict situations			
Use initiative to determine what needs to be done			
Think creatively about more efficient ways of doing tasks			
Contribute to discussions in meetings			
Communicate with colleagues on all levels			
Communicate confidently with clients			
Communicate confidently with colleagues			

Other:

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Tick (✓) the column that applies to your most appropriate response regarding the Diploma in OM (Please add any if other choices are not on the list).

Diploma: OM	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
The content that was covered in the diploma prepared me well for the job that I am currently doing.			
I can apply most of the knowledge and skills I learnt to perform the duties related to my current position.			
I could apply my knowledge and skills to this position from day one.			
I needed on-the-job training to be able to perform the duties of this position.			
The Diploma in OM has provided an advantage in getting this position.			
I feel confident about what I know and what I do at work.			
I needed support and supervision to do my daily tasks when I started working.			

Other:

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Tick (✓) the skills and competencies that you would need more training in to perform your duties effectively and successfully (Please add any if other choices are not on the list).

Skills and competencies	Need significant training	Some training required	No training required
Written communication			
Oral communication			
Telephone skills			
Financial Accounting			
Client management			
Dealing with changes in the workplace			
Word processing package functions			
Spreadsheet package			
Presentation package			
Emailing package			
Self-management			
Assertiveness and confidence			

Other:

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Tick (✓) the column that applies to your most appropriate response regarding the usefulness of syllabi offered in the Diploma in OM.

Diploma: OM	Most useful	Undecided	Least useful
Information Administration			
Business Administration			
Communication			
Financial Accounting			
Personnel Management			
Legal Practice			
Mercantile Law			
Pastel Accounting			
MS Office package			

Other:

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Indicate what aspects of the syllabi listed below were most useful or least useful. Provide brief reasons to explain your responses (Please add any if other choices are not on the list).

Information Administration:

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Business Administration:

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Communication:

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Financial Accounting:

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Legal Practice:

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Mercantile Law:

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Pastel Accounting:

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MS Office package:

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Based on your workplace requirements and your responses to the question above, what suggestions you would make to improve the Diploma in OM.

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Personal Details
Name: _____ Email address: _____
Contact telephone number at work: _____

Please tick (√) if you would like to participate in a curriculum workshop discussion at Cape Town Campus on the same topic.

Yes	No

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

Appendix O: Interview schedule for Academics

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ACADEMICS

A. GENERAL:

Name: (To be kept confidential)   Home Language:

Position held: Work Experience:

Date:

B. COURSE DESCRIPTION

1.   Please provide a brief course description of the Office Management curriculum at your institution.

2.   What is the credit requirement for this curriculum?

3.   What are the entry requirements for this curriculum?

4.   How many students are registered for the curriculum?

5.   What mode of assessment is utilised for this curriculum?

6.   What input is used to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum?

7.   What are the concerns of the stakeholders regarding the OM curriculum?

8.   What syllabi comprise the course content of the curriculum?

9.   What is the content of the syllabi which make up the curriculum?

10. What is the distribution of credits for the content of the syllabus that you teach?

11. Taking into account the assessment practices and knowledge practices of the individual syllabi, how would you categorise the underpinning knowledge of the subject content that you teach?

C. COURSE CONTENT AND UNDERPINNING KNOWLEDGE

CONTENT	Underpinning knowledge:	Any comments

Appendix P: Round one results of Delphi surveys

Critical Skills	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively	75%	73%	86%	78%
Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community	70%	73%	79%	74%
Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation	45%	73%	64%	61%
Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made	45%	73%	57%	58%
Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information	50%	33%	57%	47%
Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts	30%	27%	64%	40%
Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others	20%	40%	14%	25%
Explore education and career opportunities	20%	27%	21%	23%
Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation	20%	27%	21%	23%
Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively	15%	33%	7%	18%
Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities	15%	7%	14%	12%
Develop entrepreneurial opportunities	15%	13%	7%	12%

Personal Attributes	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Being reliable	91%	79%	80%	83%
Having honesty and integrity	91%	71%	80%	81%
Being loyal and committed	86%	64%	73%	74%
Dealing with pressure	68%	79%	60%	69%
Being adaptable	55%	64%	73%	64%
Being motivated	55%	64%	53%	57%
Having enthusiasm	55%	57%	53%	55%
Possessing common sense	50%	43%	60%	51%
Applying self-awareness and reflective practices	46%	36%	60%	47%
Having a balanced attitude to work and home life	36%	57%	47%	47%
Applying knowledge to new situations	27%	64%	40%	44%
Dealing with different cultural practices	32%	36%	60%	43%
Understanding of changing workplace situations	32%	43%	40%	38%
Possessing a positive self-esteem	27%	43%	47%	39%
Devising ways to improve on one's own actions	36%	43%	27%	35%
Having a sense of humour	14%	14%	20%	16%
Professional appearance	14%	14%	20%	16%

Information Administration	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Email and the internet	70%	92%	54%	72%
MS Office suite	70%	77%	69%	72%
Word processing	50%	69%	69%	63%
Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements	50%	77%	54%	60%
Protection of documents	55%	54%	69%	59%
Windows management	65%	54%	51%	57%
Computer security	45%	46%	39%	43%
Risk management: internet and network security	40%	46%	46%	44%
MS PowerPoint: Advanced	35%	62%	39%	45%
Management of information technology and systems	35%	54%	46%	45%
Production 35 wpm	35%	46%	54%	45%
Management decision making	25%	54%	54%	44%
Flow of information	35%	46%	46%	42%
Hardware and software	30%	39%	54%	41%
Software: Advanced text processing/Software:	40%	46%	31%	39%
Pivot tables and charts	35%	23%	39%	32%
Online forms	30%	39%	23%	31%
MS Access	25%	23%	39%	29%
Networks	30%	31%	8%	23%
In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services	15%	39%	8%	21%
Pastel	10%	39%	15%	21%
MS Project	15%	23%	23%	20%
Systems development	15%	31%	15%	20%
VLookup and advanced filtering	30%	8%	15%	18%
Evaluation of hardware and software	15%	15%	15%	15%

Business Administration	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
The office: organisation and supervision	79%	85%	92%	85%
Administrative procedures	68%	85%	92%	82%
Control of office activities	63%	77%	58%	66%
Management functions	26%	69%	75%	57%
Financial management	42%	69%	42%	51%
Human resource management	42%	54%	50%	49%
Evaluation of administrative systems	32%	69%	42%	48%
Systems design and analysis	16%	54%	42%	37%
Strategic management	16%	54%	42%	37%
Risk management	42%	31%	33%	35%
Business sectors	16%	54%	33%	34%
Labour relations	21%	39%	33%	31%
Economic structures, principles and development	11%	54%	17%	27%
Entrepreneurship	11%	31%	17%	20%
Outsourcing management	11%	31%	17%	20%

Communication	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Oral communication and presentation skills	70%	79%	73%	74%
Listening skills and conflict resolution	70%	64%	80%	71%
Teamwork and small groups	65%	50%	73%	63%
Telephone technique	58%	58%	59%	58%
Intercultural communication	52%	44%	53%	50%
Organisational communication	51%	45%	53%	50%
Goals and objectives	39%	50%	60%	50%
Emails and facsimiles	48%	50%	46%	48%
Professional self-development	54%	36%	47%	46%
Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes	39%	43%	40%	41%
Report writing	35%	29%	47%	37%
Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.	35%	36%	27%	33%
Research: referencing skills	30%	29%	27%	29%
CV writing and interviewing skills	22%	29%	13%	21%
Proposals	9%	29%	7%	15%
Communication theory	9%	14%	13%	12%

Personnel Management	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Resolving frustration and conflict	64%	79%	92%	78%
Stress management	64%	86%	67%	72%
Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace	64%	64%	83%	70%
Dealing with individuals	77%	50%	67%	65%
Personal relationships on the job	55%	36%	33%	41%
Business psychology and human behaviour	18%	43%	42%	34%
Dealing with small groups	41%	29%	25%	32%
Human resource management: introduction	18%	50%	25%	31%
Social and personal perception	18%	29%	25%	24%
Remuneration and remuneration models	0%	36%	25%	20%

Financial Accounting	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Budgets and budgetary control	64%	83%	88%	78%
Introduction to accounting	50%	75%	75%	67%
Analysis and interpretation of financial statements	36%	75%	63%	58%
Bank reconciliation statements	43%	50%	38%	44%
Debtors	43%	42%	38%	41%
Creditors	43%	42%	38%	41%
Ledger and trial balance	36%	42%	38%	39%
Stock	36%	42%	38%	39%
Subsidiary journals	36%	33%	38%	36%
Fixed assets	29%	42%	38%	36%
Results of operations and financial positions	21%	50%	38%	36%
Clubs and non-trading undertakings	14%	17%	25%	19%

Legal Practice and Mercantile Law	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Labour law	75%	44%	25%	48%
General principles of the law of contract	25%	67%	38%	43%
Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents	25%	33%	38%	32%
Specific contracts	0%	33%	50%	28%
The administration of justice	0%	33%	38%	24%
Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation	0%	33%	38%	24%
Introduction to the study of law	0%	22%	38%	20%
Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court	0%	22%	38%	20%
Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates	0%	22%	38%	20%
Close corporations	0%	33%	25%	19%
Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court	0%	22%	25%	16%

Appendix Q: Final round results of Delphi surveys

Critical Skills	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively	90%	91%	92%	91%
Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community	79%	75%	71%	75%
Multi-tasking	63%	83%	57%	68%
Self-motivation	63%	75%	65%	68%
Being able to work under stress	53%	92%	57%	67%
Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation	68%	51%	78%	66%
Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information	53%	50%	64%	56%
Life skills, behaviour and attitudes	52%	51%	64%	56%
Being able to embrace diversity in the workplace	42%	75%	42%	53%
Person to be compatible with company ethics	52%	58%	42%	51%
Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made	47%	42%	57%	49%
Control and feedback of task progress	57%	17%	50%	42%
Strategic evaluation and planning	31%	25%	57%	38%
Numeric accuracy	31%	34%	42%	36%
Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation	10%	34%	35%	27%
Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts	21%	33%	21%	25%
Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively	5%	25%	42%	24%
To communicate and build relationships with similar or related organisations i.e. networking	10%	33%	28%	24%
Explore education and career opportunities	15%	25%	14%	18%
Develop entrepreneurial opportunities	0%	25%	21%	15%
Analyse team members e.g. use Meyers, Briggs characteristics to optimise synergistic contribution	5%	16%	21%	14%
Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others	5%	9%	21%	12%
Participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities	0%	9%	14%	8%

Personal Attributes	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Having honesty and integrity	79%	100%	86%	88%
Being reliable	74%	100%	72%	82%
Being loyal and committed	74%	92%	57%	74%
Using one' own intuition: to think and work on one's own	68%	67%	86%	74%
Punctuality	68%	58%	79%	68%
Being motivated	57%	59%	72%	63%
Being adaptable	57%	66%	59%	61%
Possessing common-sense	47%	66%	64%	59%
Having self-confidence	36%	66%	71%	58%
Dealing with pressure	47%	66%	57%	57%
Go the extra mile and do more than what's expected	52%	75%	43%	57%
A positive attitude	52%	66%	50%	56%
Possessing a positive self-esteem	47%	50%	71%	56%
Applying knowledge to new situations	51%	58%	50%	53%
Flexibility	57%	50%	36%	48%
Having enthusiasm	42%	41%	57%	47%
Creativity and innovativeness	42%	34%	64%	47%
Ability to resolve/address conflict in the workplace	31%	50%	57%	46%
Maturity	31%	50%	57%	46%
Not allowing personal problems to interfere with work	47%	34%	50%	44%
Persistence	26%	42%	57%	42%
Having a balanced attitude to work and home life	26%	50%	43%	40%
Communicate with top level executives	36%	41%	36%	38%
Tolerance and diplomacy	36%	34%	43%	38%
High level of emotional intelligence/control	21%	42%	50%	38%
Understanding of changing workplace situations	47%	33%	28%	36%
Professional appearance	31%	34%	36%	34%
Applying self-awareness and reflective practices	21%	33%	42%	32%
Dealing with different cultural practices	15%	50%	21%	29%
Devising ways to improve on one's own action	26%	25%	35%	29%
Having a sense of humour	5%	41%	14%	20%
Empathy for "plight" of stress	5%	8%	1%	5%

Information Administration	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
MS Office suite	82%	83%	77%	81%
Word processing	76%	73%	72%	74%
Emails and the Internet	58%	83%	62%	68%
Spreadsheets: Excel IF statements	58%	66%	46%	57%
Protection of documentation	58%	51%	61%	57%
Windows management	29%	50%	53%	44%
MS PowerPoint: Advanced	41%	58%	23%	41%
Advanced skills on Excel	47%	58%	15%	40%
Computer security	29%	26%	61%	39%
Back-up procedures and software	11%	58%	38%	36%
Flow of information	35%	26%	46%	36%
Management of Information technology and systems	17%	41%	31%	30%
Structuring a document management system	23%	25%	38%	29%
Management decision-making	5%	50%	31%	29%
Ability to identify different types of hardware/software or being able to identify computer security threats	17%	25%	38%	27%
Risk management: internet and network security	17%	17%	46%	27%
Production 35wpm	5%	34%	38%	26%
Online forms	11%	8%	46%	22%
In-House Training vs. Consultancy Services	17%	25%	23%	22%
Password setting etc.	17%	25%	23%	22%
VLookup and advanced filtering	23%	17%	16%	19%
Software: Advanced text processing/ Software: advanced data capturing	5%	25%	23%	18%
Systems development	5%	16%	31%	18%
Pastel	5%	16%	23%	15%
Networks	5%	9%	30%	15%
Hardware and software	11%	8%	23%	14%
Online design and development of information, graphs and pictures	0%	33%	8%	14%
MS Project	0%	16%	23%	13%
MS Publisher	5%	16%	16%	13%
Pivot tables and charts	11%	16%	8%	12%
SAP - Systems Application Programming	11%	16%	8%	12%
How to use online customer relationship management software (CRM)	17%	8%	7%	11%
Pastel payroll	0%	16%	15%	11%
MS Access	0%	8%	23%	10%
Evaluation of hardware and software	11%	8%	7%	9%
Legal software such as "Ghost Convey"	0%	8%	7%	5%
MS Visio for business process modelling	5%	8%	1%	5%

Business Administration	Employee	Graduate	Academics	Consensus
Time management	77%	90%	100%	89%
Understand the critical importance of administration as one of the pillars in any organisation	68%	58%	93%	73%
Administrative procedures	68%	58%	92%	73%
Control of office activities	58%	62%	52%	57%
Knowledge of company policies and procedures	52%	60%	46%	53%
The Office: organisation and supervision	52%	40%	54%	49%
Human resource management	35%	50%	54%	46%
Evaluation of administrative systems	35%	50%	46%	44%
Knowledge of planning, executing and reviewing events such as meetings, travel arrangements, workshops etc.	23%	50%	54%	42%
Financial Management	23%	40%	62%	42%
Understanding workplace safety and security issues	35%	30%	46%	37%
Management functions	23%	30%	54%	36%
Labour relations	11%	50%	39%	33%
Strategic management	11%	30%	46%	29%
Project management	5%	50%	31%	29%
Risk management	23%	11%	46%	27%
Systems design and analysis	11%	30%	31%	24%
Marketing and research	11%	30%	24%	22%
Entrepreneurship	5%	40%	15%	20%
Business sectors	5%	30%	24%	20%
Integrated project management skills	0%	40%	15%	18%
Change management skills	5%	10%	39%	18%
Knowledge of forms design	11%	11%	31%	18%
Business processes - (Systems Application Curriculum)	17%	20%	8%	15%
Understanding the ergonomic environment	11%	10%	15%	12%
Process improvement methodologies and skills	0%	10%	23%	11%
Feedback part of risks and control	5%	1%	23%	10%
Economic structures, principles and development	0%	10%	8%	6%
Marketing	0%	10%	8%	6%
Outsourcing management	0%	0%	15%	5%
Practical aspects of supply chain management	0%	0%	0%	0%

Communication	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Correct written language	68%	91%	73%	77%
Understanding English language and application	62%	91%	60%	71%
Documentation etiquette	63%	83%	66%	71%
Teamwork and small groups	71%	68%	70%	70%
Listening skills and conflict resolution	50%	50%	91%	64%
Oral communication and presentation skills	56%	41%	91%	63%
Control of one's emotions	56%	58%	41%	52%
Goals and objectives	50%	33%	66%	50%
Telephone technique	43%	50%	41%	45%
Business letters: letters of complaint, enquiry, invitation, thanks, etc.	37%	25%	66%	43%
Emails and facsimiles	43%	41%	41%	42%
Proficiency in at least two official languages	18%	50%	58%	42%
Meeting correspondence: notice, agenda, minutes	37%	26%	50%	38%
CV writing and interview skills	12%	42%	50%	35%
Report writing	25%	41%	33%	33%
Intercultural communication	37%	25%	33%	32%
Organisational communication	36%	26%	33%	32%
Proposals	12%	50%	33%	32%
Professional self-development	25%	33%	34%	31%
Website communication – Facebook, Twitter and other digital forms of communication	12%	25%	50%	29%
Research: referencing skills	30%	29%	27%	29%
Making calendar entries	18%	18%	41%	26%
Formulating project work charters at a more senior level	18%	25%	25%	23%
Knowledge of a business case at a more senior level	12%	33%	17%	21%
Brochures and posters	6%	33%	17%	19%
Sending announcements	6%	8%	33%	16%
Facilitation (workshops)	6%	8%	25%	13%
Communication theory	0%	16%	16%	11%
Conference calls	6%	8%	16%	10%

Personnel Management	Employer	Graduates	Academic	Consensus
Upholding confidentiality	86%	80%	73%	80%
Dealing with individuals	86%	80%	64%	77%
Attitudes and behaviour in the workplace	53%	70%	63%	62%
Understanding of organisational culture	60%	60%	63%	61%
Stress management	46%	70%	45%	54%
Personal relationships on the job	60%	60%	36%	52%
Knowledge of labour laws and disciplinary procedures	33%	70%	46%	50%
Emotional intelligence	46%	50%	45%	47%
Personal development	40%	31%	63%	45%
Resolving frustration and conflict	33%	41%	54%	43%
Business psychology and human behaviour	20%	70%	36%	42%
Monitor students' growth and development	20%	50%	46%	39%
Dealing with small groups	33%	50%	27%	37%
Human resource management: introduction	13%	40%	36%	30%
Social and personal perception	13%	31%	45%	30%
Students to gain understanding of subject matter	13%	20%	54%	29%
Performance measures and tracking using KPIs to report to management	20%	30%	36%	29%
Performance appraisal	26%	21%	36%	28%
Organisation and storage of personnel data	13%	20%	45%	26%
Remuneration and remuneration models	20%	30%	27%	26%
Performance management	20%	20%	27%	22%
Drafting of job description	20%	10%	27%	19%
Interviewing candidates for positions	13%	1%	27%	14%
To conduct individual assessments at the beginning of the students' first year	6%	20%	9%	12%

Financial Accounting	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Budgets and budgetary control	46%	50%	83%	60%
How to read a balance sheet and profit and loss accounts	18%	67%	83%	56%
Results of operations and financial positions	9%	83%	50%	47%
Introduction to accounting	36%	16%	83%	45%
Legislation and financial policies	36%	50%	50%	45%
Analysis and interpretation of financial statements	9%	50%	66%	42%
Understanding monthly requisitions - to form part of budgets	9%	66%	50%	42%
Petty cash management	18%	16%	83%	39%
Income statement	0%	66%	50%	39%
Stock	27%	0%	83%	37%
Debtors	9%	33%	66%	36%
Creditors	9%	33%	66%	36%
Bank reconciliation statements	9%	33%	50%	31%
Ledger and trial balance	9%	33%	50%	31%
Fixed assets	9%	33%	50%	31%
Cash flow management to balance sheet	9%	33%	50%	31%
Subsidiary journals	9%	16%	50%	25%
Costing and financial modelling at a more senior level	0%	50%	16%	22%
Bank interface exception reports	1%	16%	33%	17%
Clubs and non-trading undertakings	0%	16%	16%	11%

Legal Practice and Mercantile Law	Employer	Graduate	Academic	Consensus
Knowledge of applicable legislation in the context of the working environment	50%	78%	75%	68%
Labour law	75%	44%	25%	48%
General principles of the law of contract	25%	66%	37%	43%
Business law in order to be equipped to start own business	25%	66%	37%	43%
Intellectual property: copyright, trademarks and patents	25%	33%	37%	32%
Specific contracts	0%	33%	50%	28%
The administration of justice	0%	34%	37%	24%
Introduction to civil procedure and criminal litigation	0%	33%	38%	24%
Introduction to the study of law	0%	22%	37%	20%
Debt collection procedures in the Magistrate's Court	0%	22%	37%	20%
Introduction to wills, conveyancing, administration of estates	0%	22%	37%	20%
Close corporations	0%	33%	25%	19%
Divorce and insolvency proceedings in the High Court	0%	22%	25%	16%