

Artigo Original

Professional development in Distance Education: action research on the formation of the mediation team at Univesp

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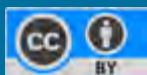
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Abstract

The Virtual University of the State of São Paulo (Univesp) has as its institutional policy the training of graduate students for professional performance in Distance Education. The aim of this work is to analyze the main contributions of the actors that organize the mediation, as a team that articulates the operational and didactic-pedagogical processes of the institution, as well as to evaluate the professional development for Distance Education in higher education, focusing on the post-graduation course “Didactic-pedagogical training for distance learning courses”. The study can be classified as an action research, as it reports, through experience, the methodologies developed in a field (university) from the content analysis of an electronic questionnaire applied to 366 concluding facilitators about their evaluation of the teacher training program, including the description of the context and procedures, in addition to the formative and summative evaluation methods, all appropriate and based

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on the CIPP (Context, Input, Process and Product) model by Stufflebeam (2000). The results show that the themes questioned by the research subjects (training course; adequacy of allocations in practical activities; institutional communication) generated several innovative processes developed by the mediation team, fulfilling the institutional objective of creating conditions for professional development and full use of the teaching and learning propositions..

Keywords: Distance Education. Higher education. Professional development. Pedagogical mediation.

1. Introduction

In the face of constantly evolving educational scenarios, this article aims to analyze the main contributions of professionals who coordinate the operational and didactic-pedagogical processes of the Virtual University of the State of São Paulo (Univesp), as well as to evaluate the professional development for performance in Distance Education in higher education. This analysis is based on certain demands presented by the concluding students of the institution's postgraduate program, known as facilitators.

The pedagogical mediation team is comprised of various actors and is responsible for establishing a dialogic and motivating communication throughout the learning journey (UNIVESP, 2020a). Some of them are part of the institution's technical-pedagogical staff (permanent or appointed), but the majority consists of temporary collaborators who participate in training programs for teaching or management in Distance Education, such as facilitators and technical training scholarship holders.

Facilitators participate in the "Didactic-pedagogical Training for Distance Mode Courses" program which, since 2019, has been offered as a Specialization course. In this course, master's and doctoral students from public universities in the state of São Paulo (USP, Unesp, and Unicamp) are enrolled as *lato sensu* postgraduate students at Univesp,

in the aforementioned theoretical-practical training program for performance in Distance Education (ED).

Upon entering the program, these students from partner universities are referred to as facilitators, as they engage in both theoretical training modules and practical mediation activities with undergraduate students. Those who complete all modules of the program, including the Capstone Project (*Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso - TCC*), receive a certificate of completion for the “Specialization in Didactic-Pedagogical Processes for Distance Mode Courses”, totaling 960 hours of training.

The curriculum for this course underwent some adjustments in 2020, but for both the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, the specialization course lasted two years. During this period, provided they were also linked to the *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs of the partner universities, the student was entitled to a scholarship to participate in this training, committing to dedicate 12 hours per week to activities at Univesp, including 4 hours for theoretical training and 8 hours for practical activities.

The facilitator training program constitutes the institution's main policy for forming its pedagogical mediation team and reveals a unique approach to professional development. Here, future ED teachers/tutors enroll as students in the specialization course and simultaneously gain practical experience by mediating the learning of undergraduate students. This is an experience that facilitates a range of learnings and connects theory and practice in the process of teacher training (GALASSO; MATUDA, 2021).

The program's selected audience consists of individuals with solid backgrounds in the subject areas offered by Univesp's undergraduate programs, who may not always have teaching experience in distance learning modalities. As the program's proposal is precisely professional development, similar to what happens in undergraduate education or other professional training courses where students undergo “supervised internships”, facilitators are supported by more experienced professionals in their practical activities.

In 2020-2021, part of the supervision team consisted of scholarship holders from the “Development of Innovative Solutions for Distance

Education” (DIS/ED) program, masters and doctorates, selected based on their background in strategic areas of Univesp and their experience in ED. These scholarship holders acted as mediation supervisors, overseeing the activities of facilitators with undergraduate students. In this role, among other tasks, they were responsible for mediating the facilitators' relationship with the coordination; facilitating the connection between facilitators, teachers, and teams responsible for developing didactic materials and structuring the Virtual Learning Environment; monitoring the facilitators' practical activities; and evaluating their monthly reports. This article is one of the outcomes of that program.

2. Team Formation in the Context of Educational Transformations

With the consolidation of Web 2.0 and the advent of Web 3.0, the flow of information in virtualized spaces has significantly expanded access to digital services. This new dynamic, characterized by networked action, alters organizational practices, particularly in the mechanisms of creation, sharing, and dissemination of information. Institutional processes, previously stable and segmented, are now accelerated through collaborative tools, leading to changes in the relationship between knowledge and society.

The field of education is also part of this context, increasingly understood through practices of lifelong knowledge updating, especially in Distance Education (DE) propositions (MOORE; KEARSLEY, 2007). In the last two decades, the exponential growth of DE in Brazil has also been linked to the evolution of digital communication and information technologies, contributing to the promotion of access to higher education, as well as the emergence of innovative models of hybrid education. Despite the success of some proposals, balancing the knowledge management standards demanded by society with the overcoming of implemented education models presents a range of challenges for higher education institutions offering DE courses.

These changes are predicated on the full support of students in general, as well as the appropriate training of all collaborators, aiming to improve

the management of actions of professionals involved in the educational system (management, coordination, supervision, tutoring, and administrative functions). In the context of DE, the mediation team becomes responsible for interfacing between the organization and administration of the institution's joint actions and the pedagogical area (training and student support). It's essential that all agents of this team are trained and prepared in the technical-pedagogical sphere to perform their services with the highest quality.

According to Spressola (2010, p. 17), to achieve this training, it's necessary to “reformulate routines, including through continuous training, and be up-to-date with mechanisms that can facilitate knowledge and the development of mediation skills during their work”. In this sense, the program referred to in this study fulfills a dual function: to provide practical experiences for future teachers in DE and to promote students' proximity to the content, facilitating their learning.

This is because, while the facilitators are engaged in pedagogical mediation with undergraduate students, they are also training for teaching in DE. Throughout this process, an experienced supervisor accompanies the training process of those entering the professional career. According to Gaspar, Seabra, and Neves (2012), in the field of Education, this concept was initially linked only to teacher training but has been expanding in the perspective of the development of educational institutions as a whole. In the context of this study, we will discuss supervision as part of the professional development program for facilitators.

3. Professional Development and Pedagogical Mediation

In analyzing the training of teachers and tutors in a Distance Education (DE) program, Silva and Prata-Linhares (2016) highlight the fact that professional training in this area has not kept pace with the rapid growth of this modality in the country. Thus, they consider that teaching in DE shares certain similarities with face-to-face education, yet possesses "peculiarities that are directly associated with new and necessary

ways of thinking and implementing higher education" (SILVA; PRATALINHARES, 2016, p. 198).

Oliveira-Formosinho (2009) distinguishes the term professional development from the idea of continuing education, specifying that the former refers to a process of learning/growth, unlike the latter, which points to a process of teaching/training. For the author, professional development is a continuous process “[...] focused on the teacher in interaction, including formal and informal moments, with the concern of promoting educational changes for the benefit of students, families, and communities” (OLIVEIRA-FORMOSINHO, 2009, p. 226).

Although the author refers to the context of professional development of basic education teachers, it is possible to reflect on some of her points in the context of this study, especially when she describes curricular approaches and models of professional development: I - autonomous professional development; II - development based on the observation/supervision process; III - development based on the process of development and improvement.

In analyzing the training programs developed by Univesp, it is possible to notice a mix of these models. The first is easily identified in the proposal of the training courses, undertaken by the facilitators, as upon entering the program, they are enrolled in the so-called “training modules”, which are curricular components of their specialization course. These modules cover topics related to DE, such as pedagogical mediation, teaching-learning resources, and instructional design. They are courses developed by the pedagogical team of Univesp and follow a structure similar to undergraduate disciplines, with the provision of study materials, such as texts, videos, and other resources.

In addition to the hours dedicated to study, facilitators also perform 8 hours per week of practical activities, which can be of different natures, such as: didactic-pedagogical monitoring of undergraduate disciplines and guidance of Capstone Project or Integrative Project (PI) or correction of internship reports. In carrying out these activities, it is possible to notice the second model defined by Oliveira-Formosinho (2009) as “model based on observation/supervision”. For the author, it is a model

of professional development that is based, among other things, on the premise that “observation and supervision can benefit both parties involved, not only the observed teacher but also the observing teacher” (OLIVEIRA-FORMOSINHO, 2009, p. 241).

Finally, the third model of professional development described by Oliveira-Formosinho (“development based on the process of development and improvement”) can be found in the DIS/ED program, aimed at masters and doctors who acted as mediation supervisors, accompanying the activities of the facilitators with undergraduate students.

4. Methodology

In terms of its objectives, this study can be classified, according to Elliot (1997), as action research, as it reports, through experience, the methodologies implemented in a field (university), including the description of the context and procedures, as well as process and summative evaluation methods. All these are appropriate and based on Stufflebeam's CIPP model (Context, Input, Process, and Product) from 2000, a comprehensive framework for conducting formative and summative evaluations of programs, projects, personnel, products, organizations, policies, and evaluation systems. This model provides direction for evaluating the context (in terms of a company/university's need for corrections or improvements); inputs (strategies, operational plan, resources, and agreements to proceed with a necessary intervention); process (implementation of the intervention and costs); and products (the positive and negative outcomes of the effort) (STUFFLEBEAM, 2000).

Stufflebeam (2000) explains that the evaluation of the CIPP model should begin with an analysis of the context's suitability — in this case, Univesp and the outcomes of the facilitator training program evaluation. This analysis also considered what is necessary to make the work suitable for the teaching and learning processes generated by the pedagogical mediation team. The input is defined as the possible alternatives to meet the present demands, which, in this study, were collected through

a questionnaire applied and answered by 366 facilitators who completed the “Didactic-pedagogical Training for Distance Mode Courses” specialization course in July 2021.

Regarding the CIPP model, the process is understood as the path taken after monitoring the responses and defining the improvement strategies of management. Through this processual evaluation, it is possible to make small adjustments in management, drawing new plans to ensure the quality of programs. The product would be the description and evaluation of the final product, demonstrating the effectiveness of the changes implemented from the inputs generated by the questionnaires. In this analysis process, it is verified whether the goals were met, what were the negative and positive effects, and whether the proposal solved the pointed out issues. Through the CIPP evaluation, it became possible to perceive the barriers to learning and think of ways to reduce them, to increasingly create an environment suitable for the pedagogical proposal of Univesp.

The responses to the questionnaire, completed by 366 facilitators, were collected through an electronic form at the end of the facilitators' activities in the program and aimed at conducting an evaluation by the participants about their training. The questionnaire consisted of pre-established questions, mostly with objective response options, divided into three sections, organized by themes: I - training modules; II - practical activities; III - general evaluation of the program. At the end of each section, an open field was made available for the program student to construct their own text with comments and/or suggestions.

In addition to the questionnaire responses, the records of practices developed by the authors of this study — scholarship holders of the DIS/ED program — in their practice as supervisors of the facilitators between 2020-2021 were also considered.

5. Results and Discussion

To organize the information and generate improvement flows developed according to the stages of the CIPP evaluation model, the study

began with a quanti-qualitative analysis of the facilitators' responses in the questionnaire. Among the respondents, 54.92% were pursuing their master's degree and 45.08% their doctorate at partner universities, with 36.34% being students of the São Paulo State University (Unesp), 40.1% of the University of São Paulo (USP), and 35.5% of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). They came from various fields that align with the disciplines offered in Univesp's undergraduate courses (Teacher Education and Computer and Production Engineering).

In the initial analysis of the responses collected with the aforementioned form, it was identified that most aspects of the course are well evaluated by the facilitators. Thus, as this is an action research, it was chosen to identify aspects that did not obtain 70% positive evaluation in relation to the question proposed by the questionnaire, as it was understood that these contexts required some type of intervention through the mediation team.

The analysis of the questionnaire data indicated three contexts with a positive evaluation below 70%: the training course, the adequacy of the allocations of facilitators in practical activities, and institutional communication. The contexts and inputs that were designed from these situations so that the program's objectives were achieved, as well as the steps taken (processes) and the products generated, will be presented in subsections.

5.1. The Training Course

The questionnaire responses indicated that 69.40% of the facilitators evaluated that the program "contributed greatly to their training". Although this percentage is close to the cut-off defined for this study, it was considered pertinent to analyze this data in order to qualify the information and reflect on improvements to the process.

Graph I — General Evaluation of the Program



Source: Developed by the authors.

As previously mentioned, the program consists of two parts: the course, composed of training modules, and the practical activities that facilitators conduct alongside undergraduate students. The latter item will be detailed in the next topic, so in this section, we will deal with the course (training modules) and the theory-practice relationship.

To understand the context, it is important to note that the facilitators take the training modules always in the same order, according to the curriculum of the specialization course, regardless of the practical activities they are performing during the period.

Regarding the content presented in these modules, 51.91% of respondents rate it as "Good" and 38.52% as "Excellent", with 37.70% indicating that the module "Pedagogical Mediation in Distance Education" was the most relevant for their training.

The analysis of the open-ended responses on this topic shows that the facilitators have some important considerations related to the content and format of the offered modules. Expressions like "The content and availability of the material was excellent", "good materials for reading were provided, well-selected [...]"; "are effectively passed through video

lectures and base material” reveal a self-instructional model, based on the provision of contents and on the individual study of the student, which is confirmed by two of the respondents:

I missed a discussion about the culture of the students and facilitators in the mediation process. And also **channels for discussion** about the subjects between the teachers of the DE training courses and us, the facilitators. I needed to delve deeper into many contents... to have meetings... and this did not happen.

Not having **follow-up/dialogue for this training** is an issue that bothered me a lot. (Comments from facilitators, emphasis ours).

It is worth noting that the training modules have forums where it is possible to debate the studied topics. However, there is little participation, which may indicate the importance of rethinking the course structure, also considering other remarks such as “The modules could be more concise and with fewer repetitions”; “I found the Didactic Design for DE module to be tiring” or:

I think the training modules could have some more practical exercises before interacting with the students. For example, organizing live sessions among facilitators. [...] I missed content that addressed practical and human challenges of mediation, such as ethical, affective, and political issues, which permeate the facilitator's tasks.

In the first modules, we could have more content on how to use digital media and also on the cognitive theory of multimedia learning. I believe I would have done several things differently if I had known from the beginning, even if it were something like: “What to do and what not to do in DE” (Comments from facilitators).

It can be seen that the diversity of open-ended responses does not point to a single course model or content that can meet all participants'

expectations. Therefore, a possible path would be the promotion of moments for the exchange of experiences where the initial content could be enriched with interaction, promoting more dynamic, collective, and meaningful learning. This could even include problematizing the content provided, as suggested by one of the respondents (above reports). This input led to the development of a community of learning and practice, implemented as an executive social network, based on a CoPs (Community of Practices) model and configured in the Yammer solution, integrated with Microsoft tools.

The proposal is characterized as an arrangement in which groups learn by interacting informally with various and intercultural contexts, sharing research and ventures, and also deepening knowledge and practices in the area, which allows them to collaborate frequently and regularly, as well as to learn about their colleagues' good practices.

As it is a collaborative online environment, learning tends to evolve more in its qualitative form than quantitatively, as it privileges mutual commitment and responsibility to the group. These exchanges enabled professional development and, in a practical way, allowed facilitators to participate in general discussions. In about five months, this product generated over 1000 direct interactions (posts) and indirect (likes, emojis, re-posts), with 271 participants who are part of the mediation team as facilitators, mediators, and supervisors.

The product generated responds to the demand for distributed knowledge, capacity for action, and cooperative potential, as well as opens a field of action (extension) inherent to the country's public universities.

Regarding the theory-practice relationship, the facilitators' responses to this research questionnaire are also varied. Many mention that the theoretical course was fundamental for carrying out practical activities with undergraduate students. However, there are reports such as:

[...] some training modules were **not completely aligned with the activities being carried out** at the time by the facilitators, which makes the process difficult and overburdens us.

I think that often the content we saw "coincided" with what we did in facilitation. However, perhaps in order for **the theory-practice connection to become more concrete, some more direct questions can bridge this gap.** For example, in some of the subjects, we could answer questions like: How did you apply content X in your facilitation work? (Comments from facilitators, emphasis ours).

The reports from the facilitators indicate a certain disconnection between the theory of the course and the practice carried out, including a clear view of the division of hours dedicated to the program, divided into "study hours" and "activity hours". However, some of the issues that appear in these reflections end up becoming the subject of the Capstone Projects (TCC).

The TCC, the last module of the course, is carried out in groups of 5 to 7 facilitators who are guided by teachers and supervisors from Univesp. The proposal is to develop works with themes relevant to the training obtained during the course, and, in general, 92.35% of the subjects consider the topic developed to be good or excellent. However, we find other interesting remarks among the open-ended responses:

I believe the TCC module is too long. **Six months could be converted into modules that would contribute more** to specialization.

[...] I think that the guidance for research needed more updated content, other modalities of research, especially considering the field of education. For example, content on qualitative research. As we are postgraduate students, most have already gone through the process of developing a TCC. I think **the content offered in the training could be improved.**

I only have one suggestion for improving the TCC part: I believe that Univesp should be **concerned about partnering with universities that work with ethics**

committees to evaluate the works before they are started, so that the TCC is not a futile exercise but is properly published according to the rules/scientific ethics. (Comments from facilitators, emphasis ours).

Given the context of the program and the inputs presented in the questionnaire responses, it is important to note that some proposals had already been implemented by the course's pedagogical team, such as changing the duration of the Capstone Project (TCC) from one year to six months (new curriculum that will cover the next cohorts of the program), allowing for the inclusion of two new modules, each lasting three months.

As a product of the process of analyzing reflections on the theory-practice relationship, the mediation team developed a monthly report model in which facilitators could reflect on the theoretical part studied and how it contributed to the development of the practice performed alongside undergraduate students.

Furthermore, the mediation team initiated a cycle of weekly synchronous meetings, the "Papos de quinta" (Thursday Talks), aiming to gather all team members for discussions about the themes that emerged from practices carried out in different curricular components. Each week, a topic was debated, and although each session prioritized individuals involved in specific activities (internships, disciplines, integrative project, and TCC), the weekly invitation was open to the entire team. Various topics were debated: formative assessment; conflict mediation; the importance of internships in professional development; the role of the advisor; formative feedback, among others.

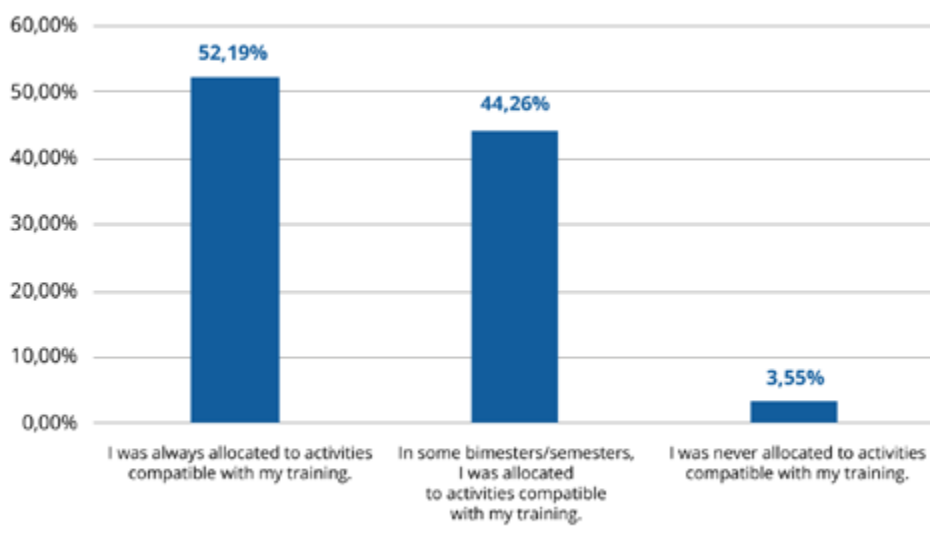
Since participation was not mandatory, the number of participants varied greatly, from 50 to 100 people. Nevertheless, it was an interesting experience as these meetings promoted the debate of pedagogical themes, not just operational ones, allowing the different actors to reflect on their performance in the pedagogical mediation activities with undergraduate students.

5.2. Appropriateness of Allocations in Practical Activities

In analyzing some reports from facilitators in the same program, Galasso and Matuda (2021) indicate that these facilitators often do not carry out their practical activities in curricular components related to their area of study, which does not prevent them from assisting the students. This highlights the facilitators' concern about being allocated to practical activities according to their areas of expertise. For example, one of the questionnaire respondents, when discussing the course's Capstone Project, mentions that her group concluded that the institution “needs to restructure the facilitators' allocation process and review the guiding documents of their work, the Institutional Development Plan, and the project of the pedagogical mediation course”.

The general questionnaire data show that 47.81% state they “never” were allocated, or were not allocated at times, to activities compatible with their training. Furthermore, 40.71% of respondents rated as “average”, “poor” and “very poor” the query about the disciplines in which they wanted to be allocated for the bimester. This indicates that the allocation process was not satisfactory even with the attempt of prior consultation (Graph 2).

Graph 2 — Appropriateness of Allocations in Practical Activities



Source: Developed by the authors.

Allocations are carried out each academic period: bimonthly for facilitators who work in the mediation of regular disciplines and semesterly for those who work in other components (internships, Capstone Projects, integrative projects). Initially, a survey is conducted using a form in which the mediation team asks facilitators to indicate their level of affinity (on a scale of 0 to 5) with the disciplines that will be offered in the next period. This is a complex process that requires adjustments between the availability of disciplines and the training of the facilitators who are in the program in each specific period, making it difficult to meet all "preference" requests.

In light of this context and with the increasing number of facilitators entering the program, the process of allocation in practical activities has been readjusted by the mediation team, the academic board, and those responsible for the specialization program. One of the main actions taken was the classification of facilitators according to their areas of training into 12 groups.

Similarly, a study of the disciplines and curricular components has been conducted in order to classify them into the same areas, which may allow for automation of the process and increase the accuracy of allocations, ensuring facilitators are working in areas compatible with their training.

Upon analyzing the areas of the questionnaire respondents (enrolled in 2019), it is clear that not all are from the areas in which Univesp offers undergraduate courses (Engineering — Production and Computing; Teacher Education — Pedagogy, Languages, and Mathematics), which makes the allocation process truly complex, as the facilitator needs to be allocated in some activity throughout the program, but there is not always an offer of disciplines related to their field of research/training.

Table 1 — Distribution of Respondents by Groups

Group	Areas	Group Participation (%)
G08	Other Engineering and Exact Sciences	18,03%
G10	Other Humanities and Arts	17,49%

G06	Human Sciences (Education)	12,30%
G01	Social and Applied Sciences (Administration, Economics, Information Science, and Law)	10,11%
G12	Multidisciplinary and others	8,47%
G04	Exact and Earth Sciences (Mathematics, Physics, and Probability and Statistics)	7,38%
G11	Health and Biology (Pharmacy, Nursing, Medicine, Dentistry, Biology)	6,56%
G05	Human Sciences (Sociology, Psychology, and History)	6,01%
G02	Engineering (Production Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Sanitary Engineering)	6,01%
G07	Linguistics, Literature	4,92%
G03	Exact and Earth Sciences (Computing)	2,19%
G09	Physical Education and Sports	0,55%
	Total overall	100,00%

Source: Developed by the authors.

This analysis allowed for the revision of the publication of new calls for program entry, which, since 2021, have begun to select facilitators based on a classification by areas of knowledge. Univesp has the prerogative to inform the number of people to be classified by group and, consequently, authorize the enrollment of students in the program.

Additionally, the selection of supervisors by areas of knowledge (since 2020) and meetings with the subject's teacher have contributed to monitoring facilitators, helping them with specific issues related to

practical activities. However, even though supervision is carried out by professionals in the field of the subjects, they may not always be able to fully meet the needs of their team of facilitators, as mentioned by one of the facilitators:

I believe that there is still room for improvement in the algorithm that selects the discipline for the facilitator. In my case, whenever I didn't feel qualified for a discipline, I was reallocated, but I know of cases where supervisors refused to reallocate the facilitator. The facilitator's good performance is also related to their confidence in the content of the discipline. Therefore, I think the request for reallocation should not be refused [...]. I also believe that, just as all the facilitators' activities are very well defined, those of the supervisors should be as well. [...] Some supervisors hold weekly live sessions with facilitators. Others hold them every two weeks, and some hold one or two throughout the entire bimester. Just as students already know what is expected of the facilitator, it should also be clear to us what to expect from the supervisor. (Comment from a facilitator).

With the automation of processes, it is evident that there is still a human factor involved, which in this case depends on the judgment and sensitivity of the supervisor regarding the need for reallocation. Additionally, the entire reallocation process needs to be closely monitored by the mediation coordination to provide quick support for the needs identified by supervisors. The facilitator's report also mentions the different ways supervisors operate and communication issues - we will address these topics in the next section.

5.3. Institutional Communication

Communication with facilitators occurs at different times and for various purposes, as they become involved in activities that span several sectors of Univesp when they join the program. In addition, general information about the program can be found by facilitators in the

admission notice and scholarship agreement, and other information is available in the learning environment and the academic system.

However, the analysis of responses to the questionnaire suggests that communication is a topic that still needs to be structured in the program. Among the respondents, 44.8% consider the information received about the scholarship as regular, bad, or terrible, and 45.63% consider the information received from the institution as regular, bad, or terrible. Difficulties in accessing information about scholarships and certifications are recurring issues in the facilitators' open responses regarding communication channels.

In my opinion, the training modules were excellent and very enriching. My only comment is regarding the completion certificates, as I believe it is relevant for us facilitators to have certificates for each of these modules.

The lack of documentation for facilitators is a serious issue that should be urgently addressed, and unfortunately, the mediation has ignored this demand. We have no proof of enrollment in the postgraduate program, let alone our performance (practical subjects, modules, workload, etc.), which could be a transcript with grades and all relevant information.

I had quite a bit of difficulty getting answers from the mediation when I had questions related to my scholarship. The messages were responded to quickly, but they did not actually answer my question at the time. (Comments from facilitators).

As a mediation team is the one that works closest to the facilitators, when the documents provided do not allow for a full understanding of all necessary information, their primary contact with other departments at Univesp is through the supervisor and mediation coordination. However, this communication is not always easy, as it requires involving various participants/sectors in the discussion. One of the facilitators shares a real perception:

Univesp gives the impression that there is no department

that truly has the competence to solve problems, such as the description of our actual performance in the certificates of the last modules. (Comment from a facilitator).

As the institution does not yet have a specific department for serving graduate students, facilitators' questions are handled by supervisors, who, in addition to monitoring the mediation processes themselves, also seek to assist students with academic records, scholarships, etc. However, there are reports from some facilitators about the various changes in processes and the difficulty in finding the correct communication channel:

I believe that the initial contact for facilitators when they join Univesp could be improved. You enter feeling a bit lost and there isn't much initial information. It takes a while to get up to speed.

The communication channels have changed a few times. There have been instances where I had a channel but wasn't attended to, and some things change and are not clear to the facilitator. **The communication channels need to always be very clear.** (Comments from facilitators, emphasis added).

To understand the context, it's important to mention that until the beginning of 2020, the institution used a package of services (email, institutional chat, cloud file storage, etc.) and a learning management system. However, both were replaced with resources from other companies, which required everyone to adapt to the new resources. The system migration occurred throughout the year and was carried out with the efforts of the mediation coordination, along with supervisors who conducted synchronous meetings and various orientation tutorials for both those who were already using the old systems and facilitators of the new cohorts.

All of these processes took time and training for the team. However, despite the introduction of new communication processes such as the institutional email on a new platform and the formation of teams using

Microsoft's Teams, there was a significant communication flow, as mentioned by some facilitators:

The switch from Google to Microsoft brought about the requirement to use many tools simultaneously, making the work more challenging. I believe that the primary communication should be focused on a single tool because we waste a lot of time searching for the information we need across different tools. (Comment from a facilitator).

After the initial adaptation period, the mediation team — along with the supervisors and based on the facilitators' feedback — began to develop ways to work with the new tools. This included creating communication channels for each supervisor, who would have a team on Teams for quicker contact with their group of facilitators. This way, information would remain in one visible place, questions could be easily resolved, and everyone would be aware of problems or solutions implemented during the course of the disciplines or guidance. While some improvements have been noticed, there is still room for improvement, as exemplified in the following report:

Each bimester, Univesp and supervision improved the processes, and communication became much better. After the change to the Microsoft system, I had difficulty with communication via Teams chat, as the chat doesn't order messages chronologically. The creation of various parallel conversations in the chat in a disorganized manner made it quite difficult to follow the conversations, and I missed some meeting appointments and important information due to this difficulty. (Comment from a facilitator).

Another issue raised by facilitators is the welcoming process when they join the program.

I missed some kind of support at the beginning of my activities. How would I be prepared? Who would provide

me with support to understand how my work would start? Starting by just attending modules of training was very strange, as I would have to work with the students, and I had no idea what my role would be.

My concern about the tutorials is related to the beginning of the activities when I felt lost. After I was properly assigned and there was the introductory live session, I felt supported and could perform my duties with ease. (Comments from facilitators).

Recognizing the need to restructure the onboarding of new facilitators, the mediation team received support from two technical training scholarship holders to organize the "Integration Week", with a schedule of synchronous meetings on topics such as the scholarship program, mediation in regular courses, mediation in the integrative project and TCC, among others.

Additionally, a solution proposed to improve the quality of information for facilitators was the creation, in the first semester of 2021, of a communication channel on Microsoft Teams called "Facilitators Integration".

This communication channel was organized into subsections to meet the various demands of facilitators, such as information about scholarships, training modules, and involvement in various practical activities. Each section was managed by a supervisor or technical training scholarship holder. In this space, the team organized a lot of scattered information and provided answers to common questions from the group of facilitators.

Some of this information was already available on a website organized by the mediation team in 2020, with the aim of gathering and organizing important topics for facilitators. However, in the integration channel, it was possible to update some of this information and provide tutorials and manuals that are important for the facilitator's role. Additionally, this channel features informative bulletins about the main events at Univesp and various day-to-day demands in the performance

of practical activities.

As a suggestion for improvement, it is important for Univesp to have a dedicated internal communication person who can continuously update this channel and address facilitators' questions, being available for synchronous communication if necessary.

6. Conclusion

The research aimed to analyze the main contributions of the actors that make up the mediation team in the quality of the operational and didactic-pedagogical processes at Univesp through the CIPP model. It can be concluded that the themes raised by the graduating facilitators of the postgraduate program generated several innovative processes developed by the mediation team, fulfilling the institutional objective of creating conditions for professional development and full utilization of teaching and learning propositions.

However, it is worth noting that, of the solutions presented for the first scenario regarding the evaluation of the training course, despite solutions being devised and practiced for formative engagement of the entire mediation team, the adherence was low, as less than 20% of facilitators were active on Yammer and in the "Thursday Chats", despite these being spaces for learning to share practices and experiences.

Concerning the allocation of practical activities, the changes made based on the analysis of the necessary areas for action and alignment brought significant technical-pedagogical organization to the institution, but there is still a need for improvement. In addition to refining adjustments between the facilitators' areas of expertise and their practical activities, it is important to plan to also relate the theoretical module to the practical activity performed by facilitators each semester, which may suggest a course with different training paths for each program participant.

Regarding communication within the mediation team, it is necessary to highlight the reformulation of communication processes among mediation agents, with specific channels for each pedagogical action.

The offer of distance learning courses has been growing in Brazilian higher education and in other parts of the world, which has prompted some reflections on distance education as a methodology, beyond its characteristics as a teaching modality. Thinking about the specificities of this education model requires the development of professional training programs for working in this context. Therefore, research projects that aim to analyze training experiences aimed at professional development in distance education are relevant and can contribute to the emerging educational scenarios.

Thus, within the context analyzed in this study, we evaluate that the maintenance of the generated products, as well as the management and continuous evaluation of these processes, are linked to the institutionalization of the proposals and their appropriation by team members, who gradually assume their roles and professional identities within the institution. It is a long process that is constituted through collective participation, considering the experiences of each participant, the relationships cultivated among them, and the use of technology tools that influence these processes.

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