FUTURE DISTANCE EDUCATORS:

A METACOGNITIVE STUDY

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Overall Research Project

To identify roles and competencies of distance education staff according to the literature (through content analysis)

To analyse quantitatively through a survey questionnaire, DE staffs' rating of the importance of each role now and in 5 years time

To determine staffs' perceptions of their competencies in each of the identified roles and present their needs for training and professional development required to fulfil these future roles

An analysis of reflective discussions with staff through face to face interviews to unpack the above findings

3 PAPERS PUBLISHED FROM THIS STUDY

1. *Roles and competencies of staff teaching fully or partly via a distance* (J. Roberts and A Bezuidenhout, 2017)
2. *Future and changing roles of distance education staff* (J Roberts, 2018)
3. *Future ready distance educators: a metacognitive study* (J. Roberts & H.D van der Walt, 2019)

Content analysis

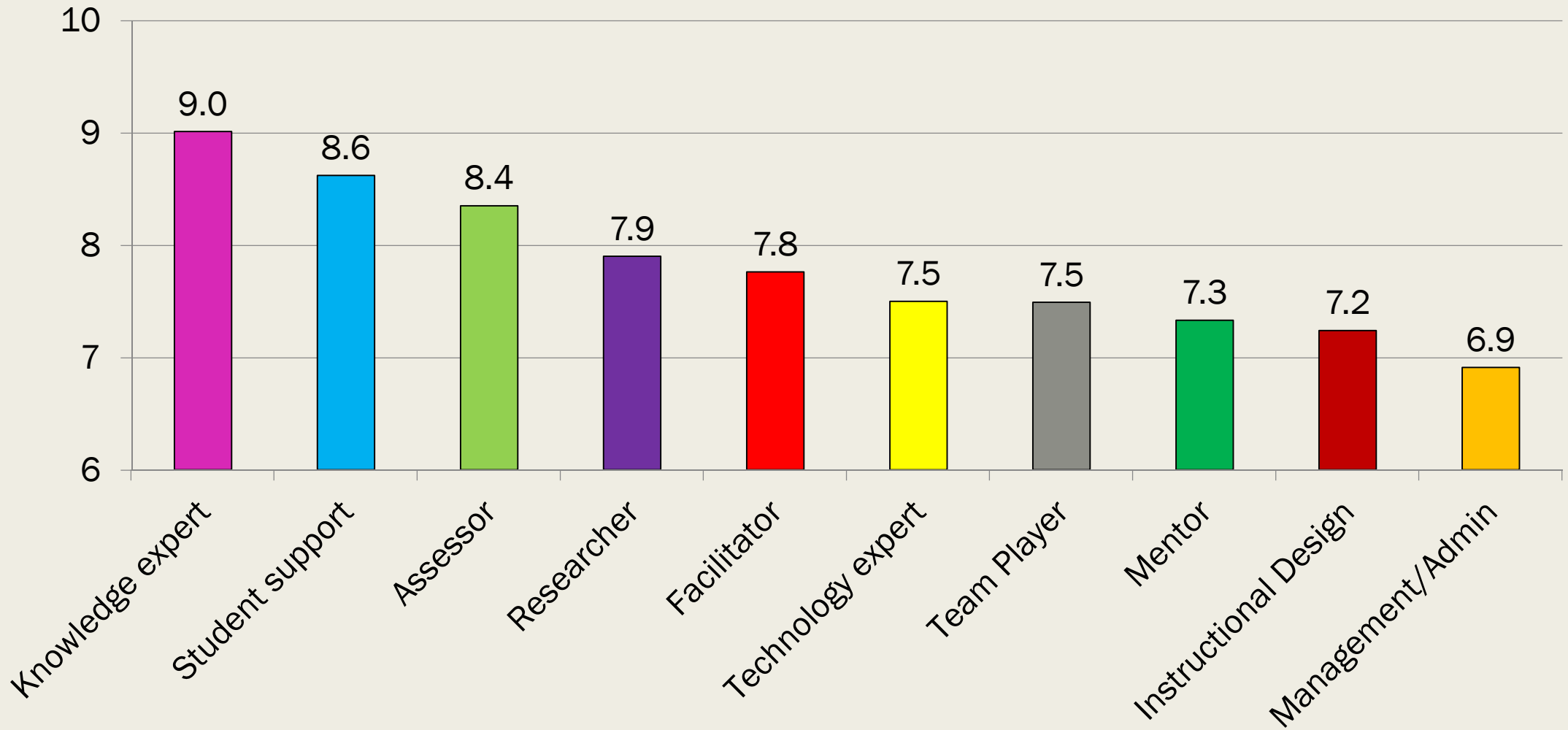
IDENTIFIED ROLES

- Knowledge expert
- Student support
- Assessor
- Researcher
- Facilitator
- Technology expert
- Team player
- Mentor
- Instructional designer
- Management/Administrator

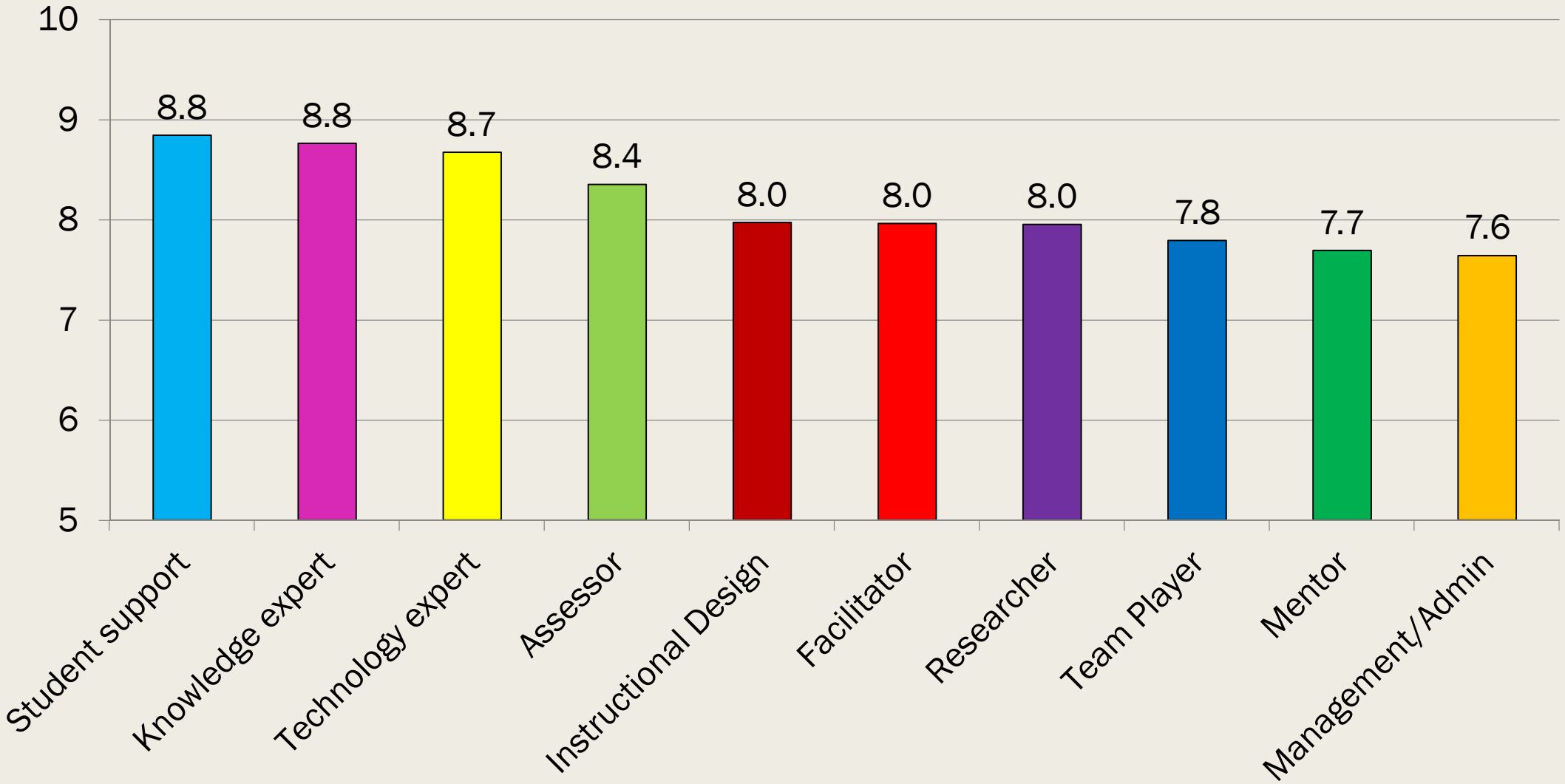
QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FROM ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Current Roles

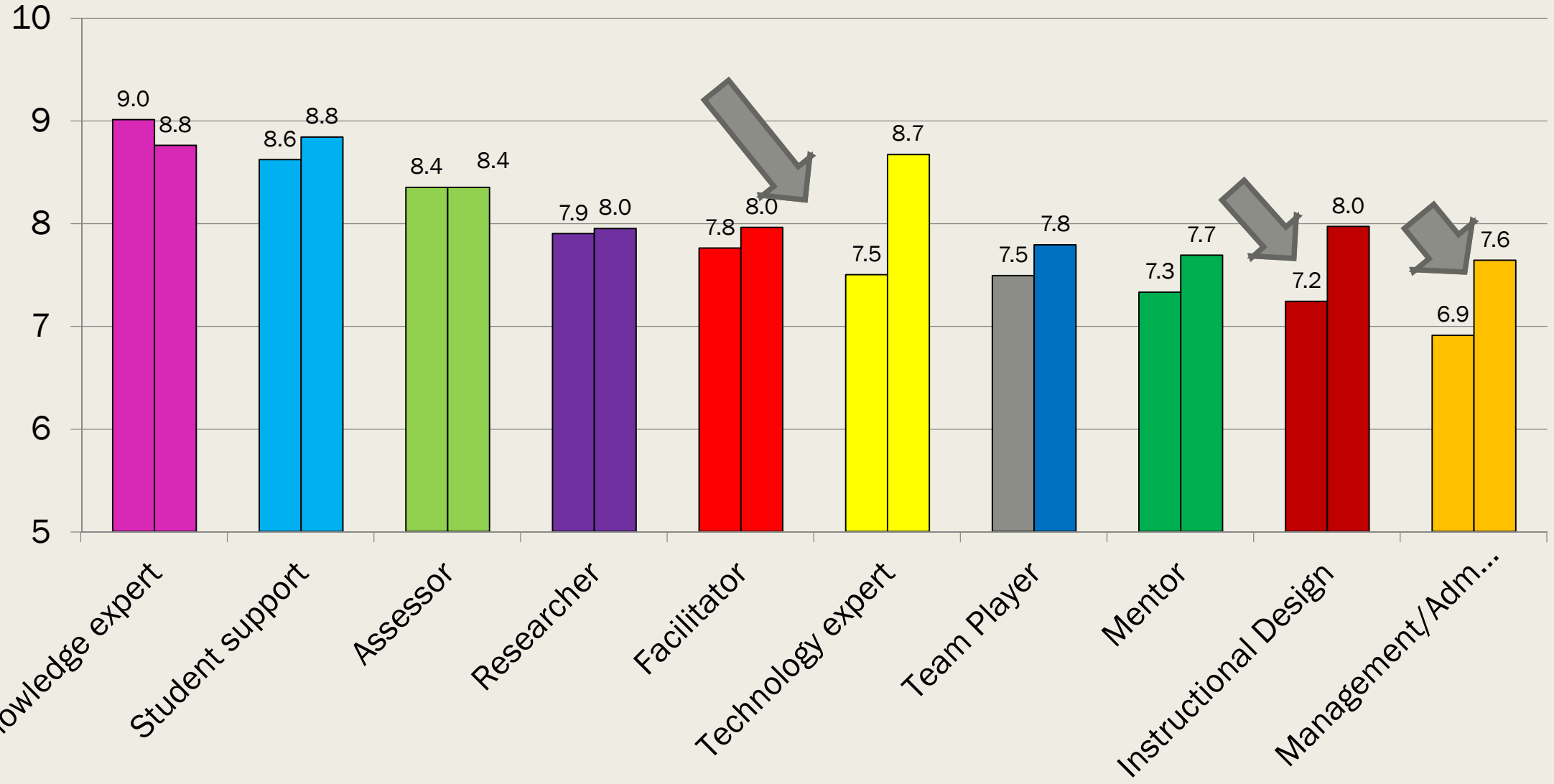
N=116



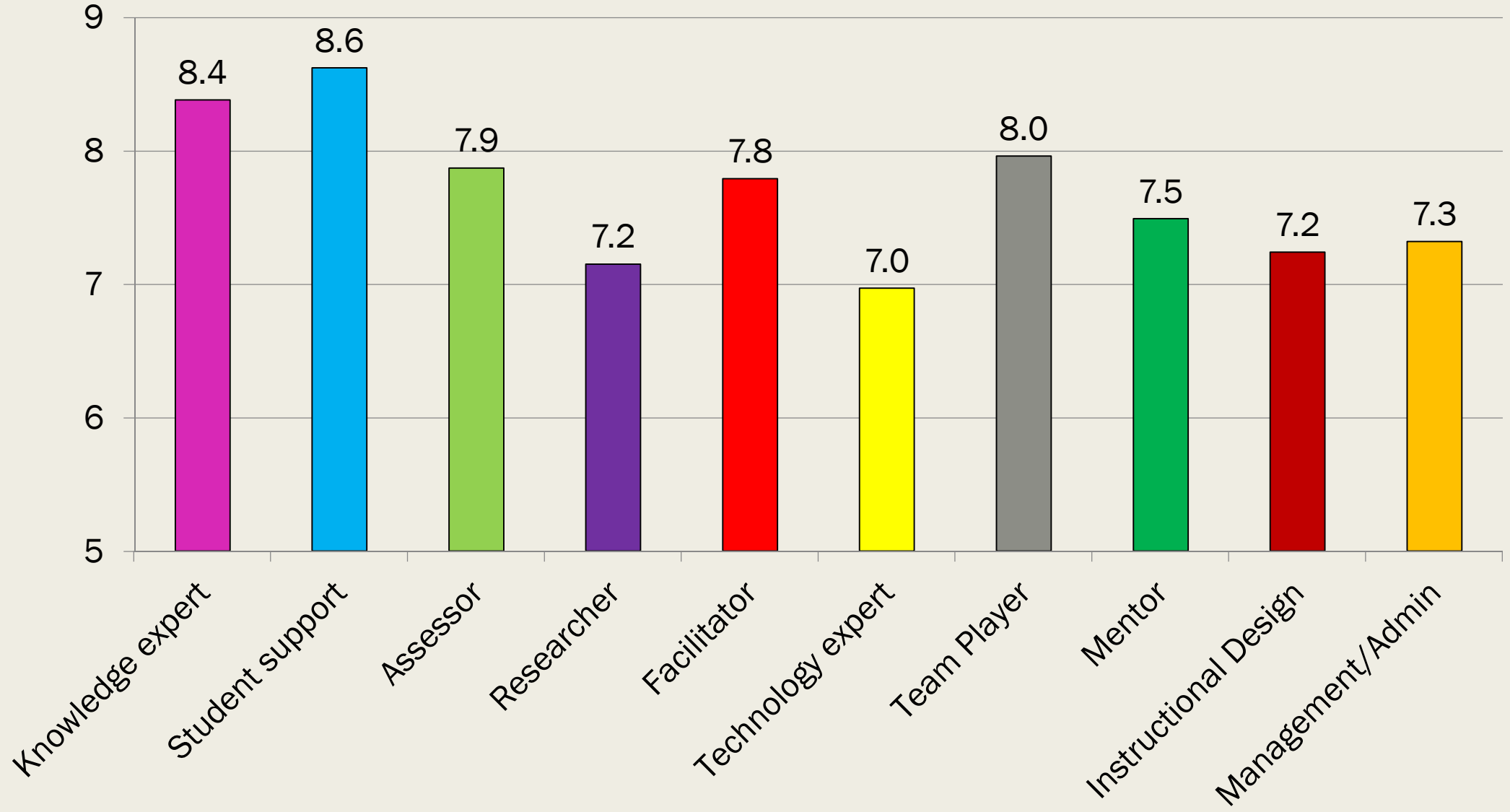
Future roles



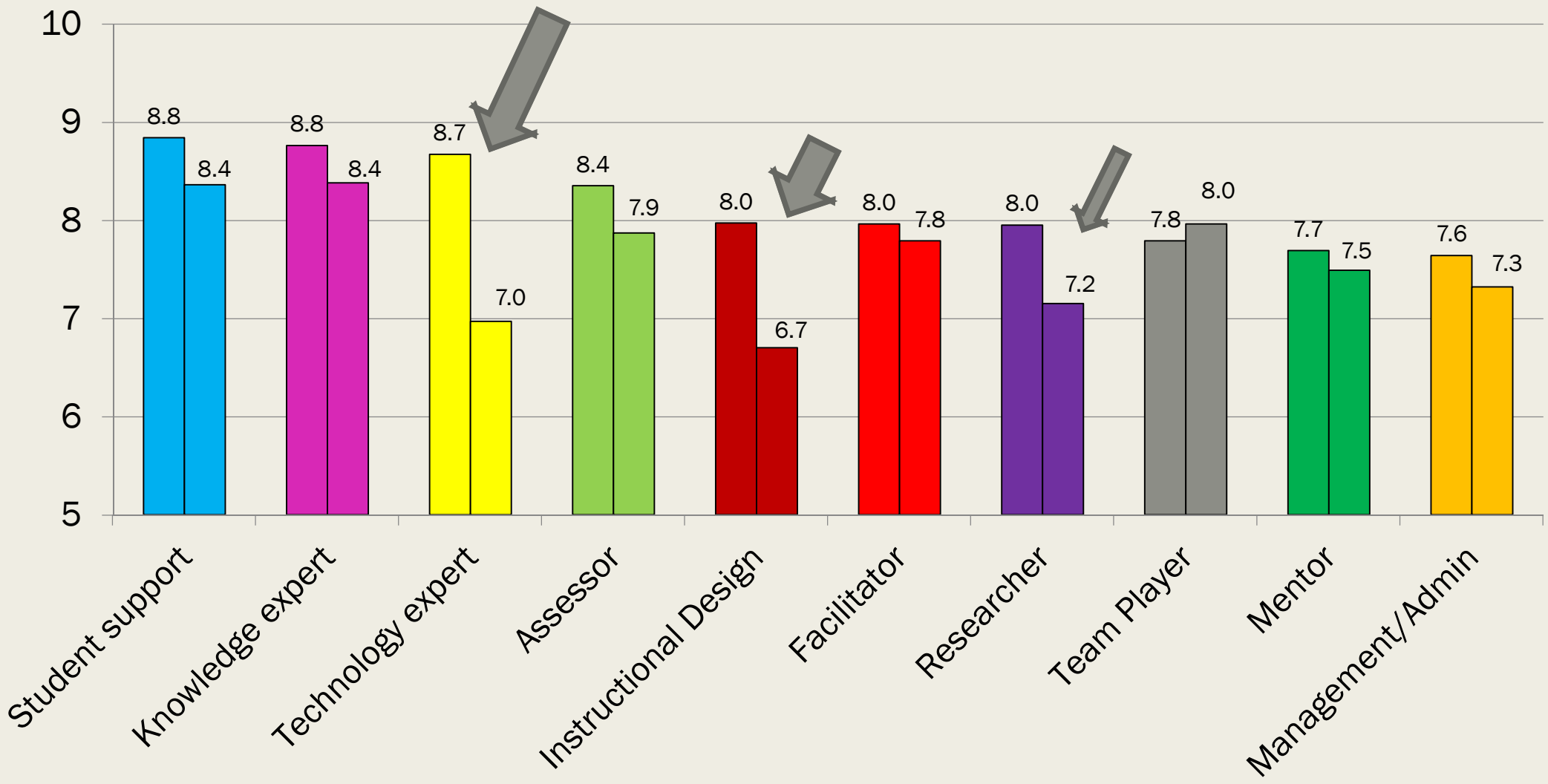
Current/future roles



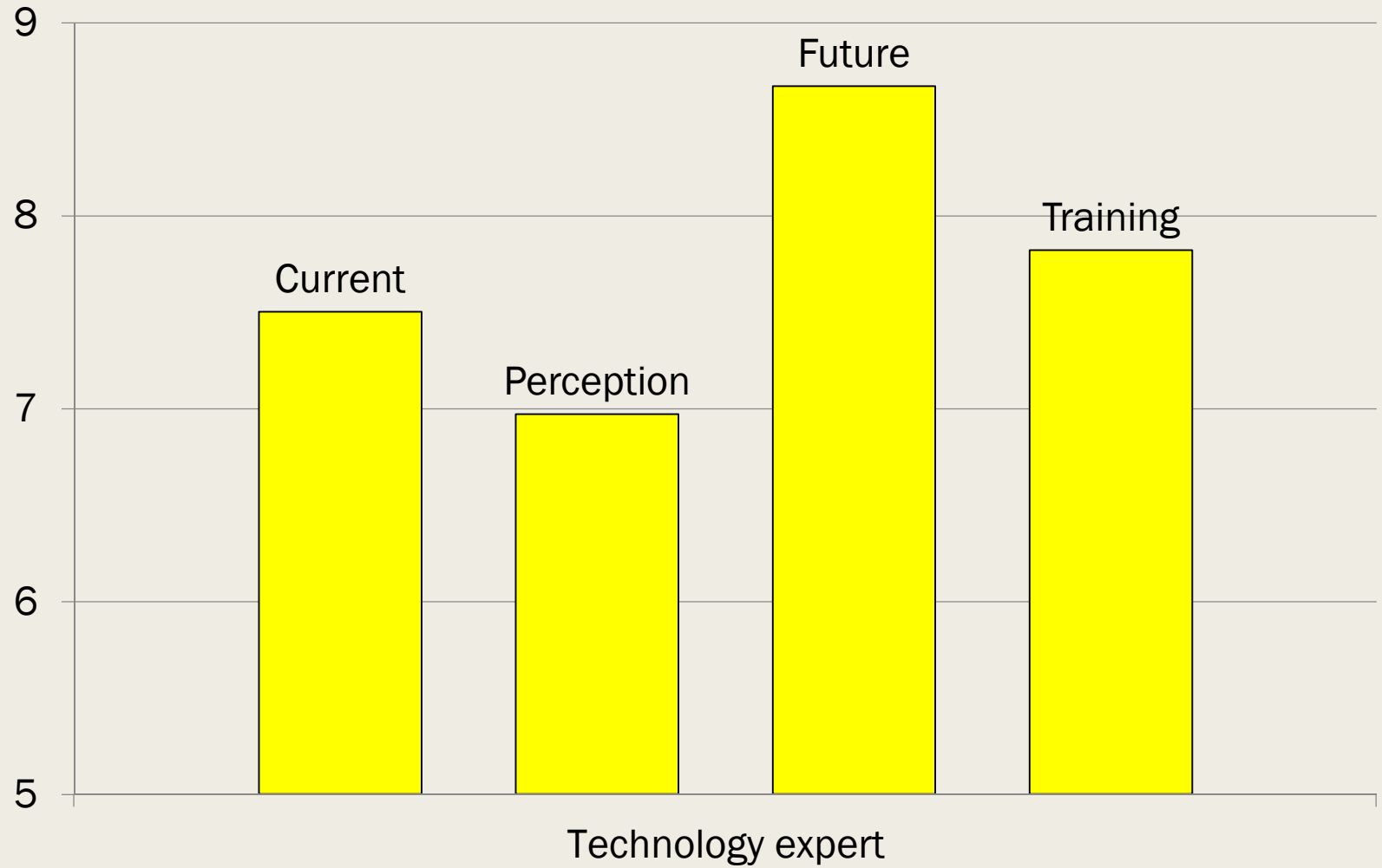
Perceived competencies



Future roles/perceived competencies



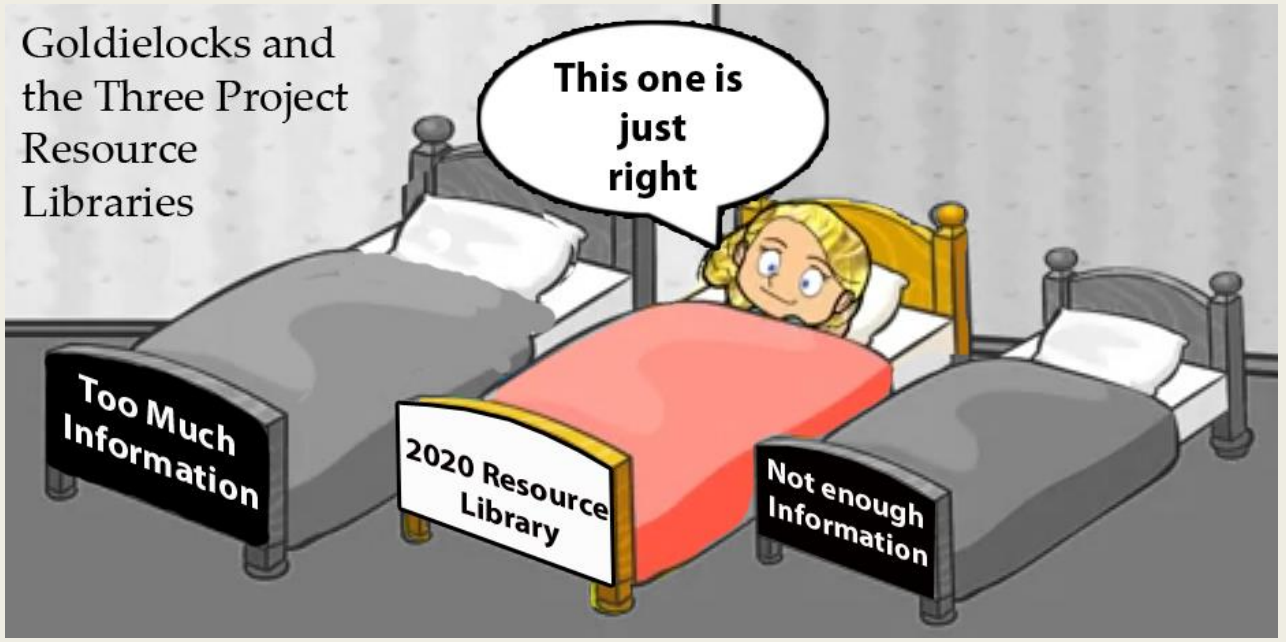
Technology expert



lagom

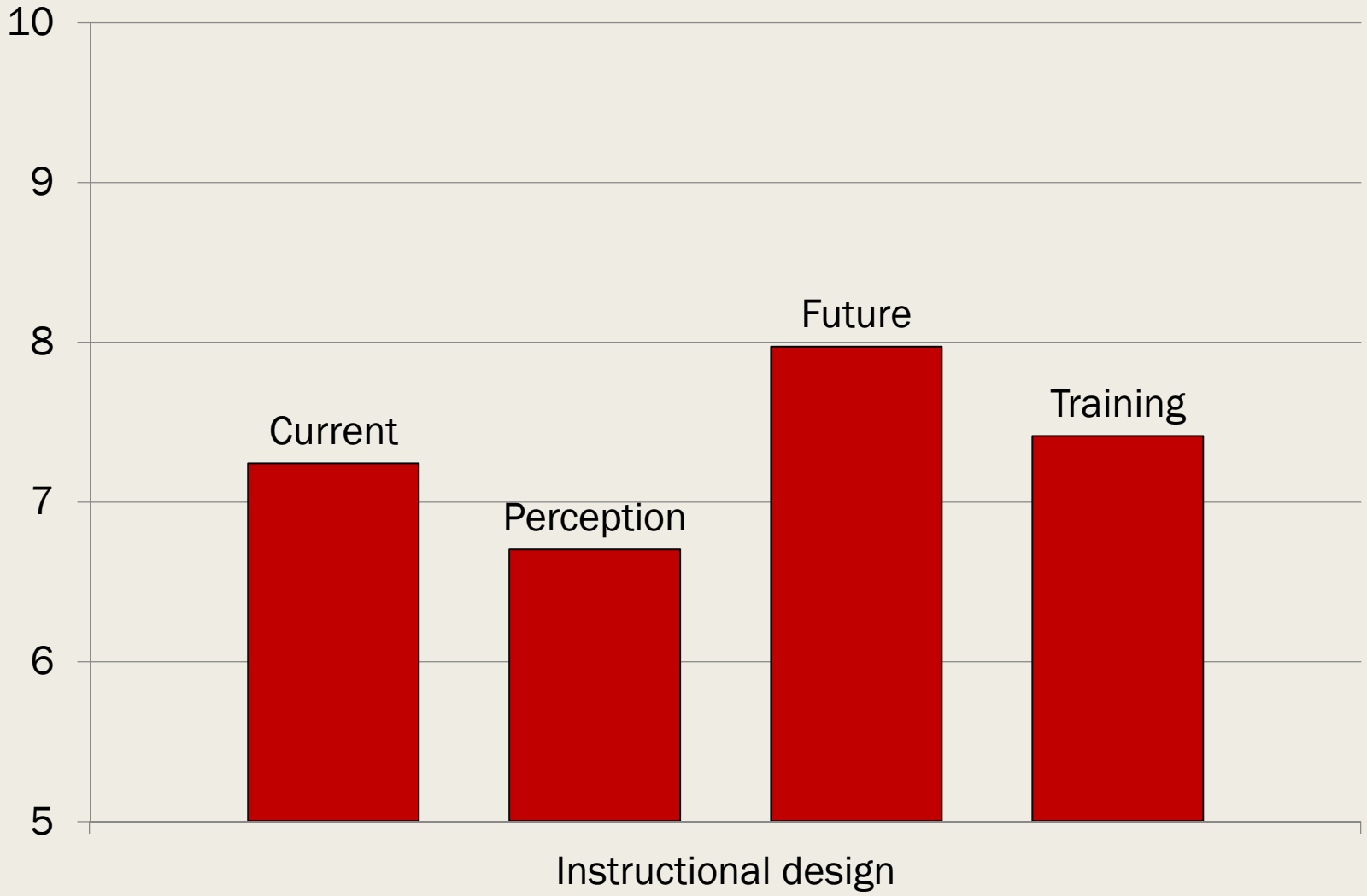
Not too little, not too much. Just right.

Swedish.

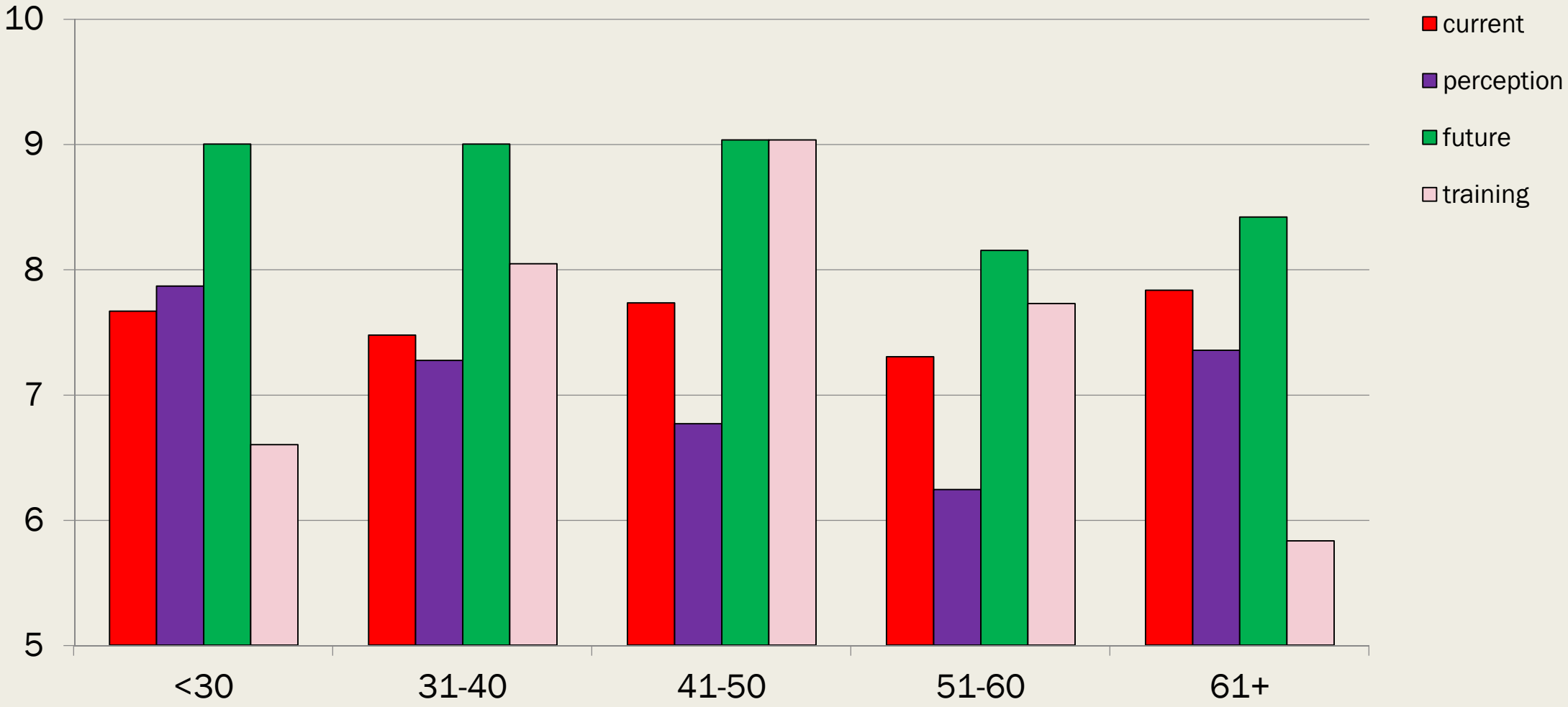


HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Instructional design

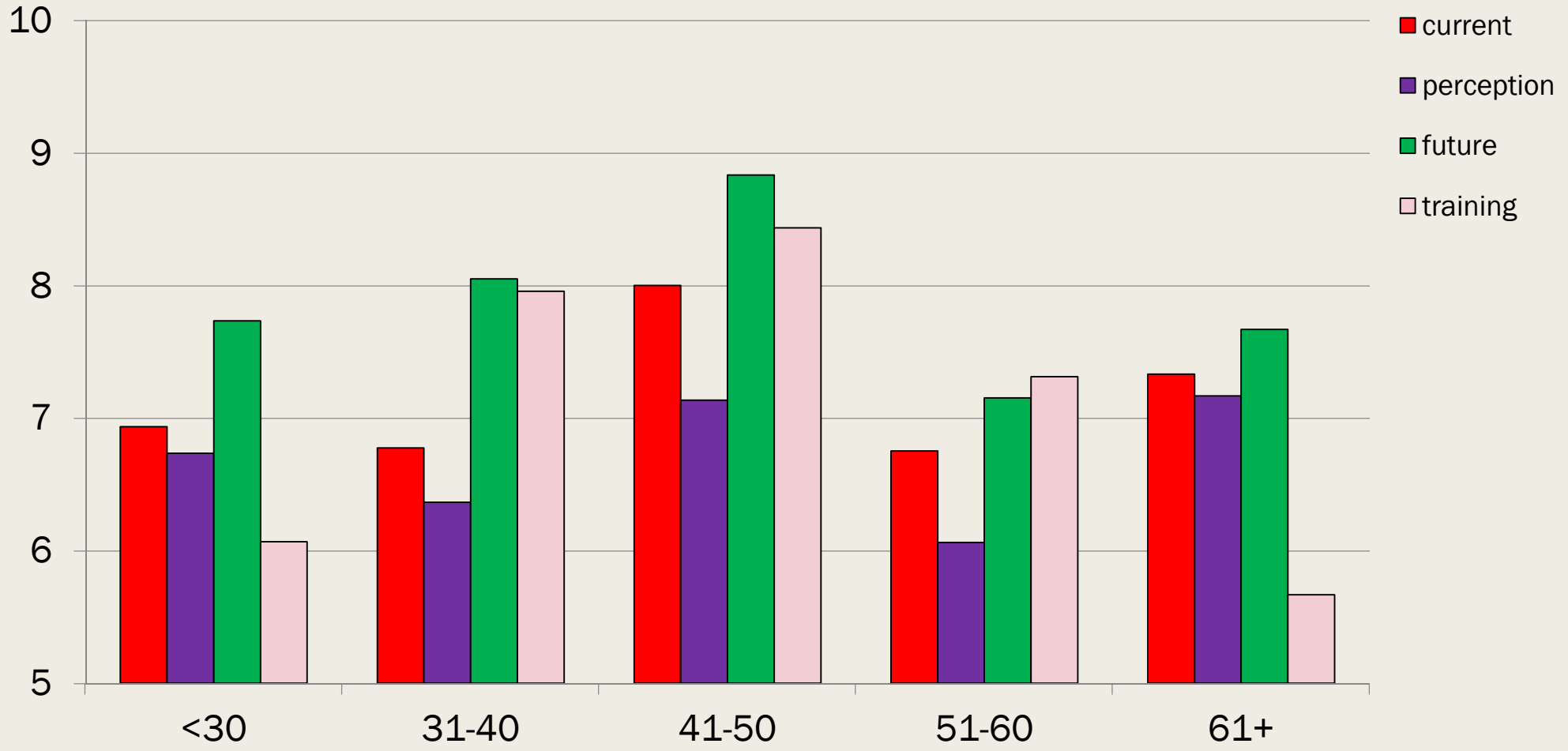


AGE – technology expert



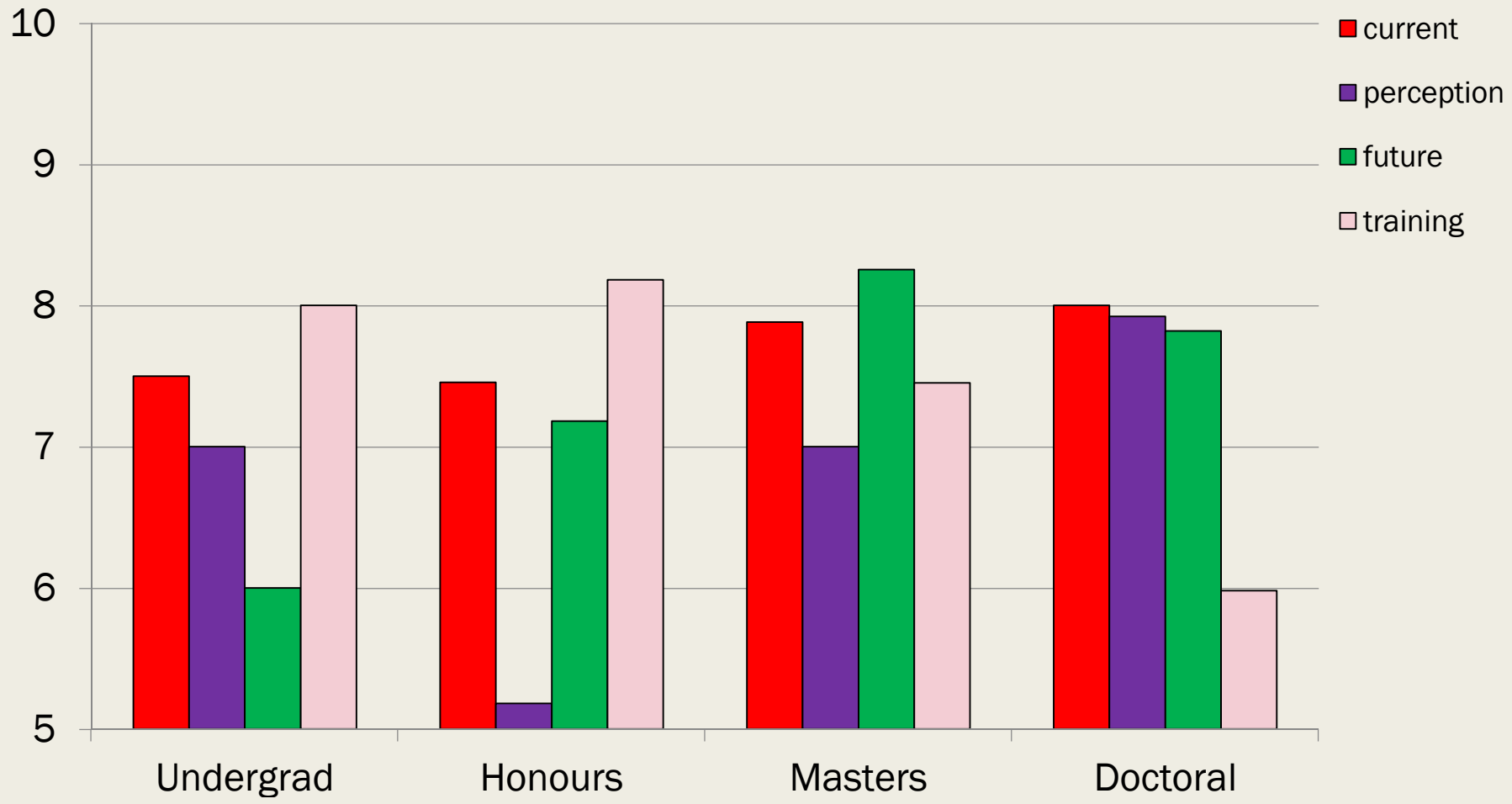
Pearson’s chi-square shows significant correlation between variables

AGE – instructional design



Perason's chi-square shows significant correlation between variables

QUALIFICATION – research



Pearson's chi-square shows significant correlation between variables

Qualitative results

In the qualitative analysis, 5 major codes emerged strongly, and these can be directly linked to some of the roles identified in the previous 2 articles.

1. Bureaucratic administrator (Management/Administrator)
2. Subject specialist
3. ODL technologist (Technology expert)
4. Researcher
5. Self-directed learner (metacognitive and reflexive practices)

BUREAUCRATIC ADMINISTRATOR

- **Role defined**

  - DEr fulfilling role as administrator in a bureaucratic environment
  - Prominent role in DE (Hulsmann, Makoe & Zawada, 2016)
  - Although crucial to QC, removes precious time spent on academic related tasks (Paewai, Meyer, & Houston, 2007)
  - Role would not dissipate from DE and could possibly increase in future.

- **Data presented**

  - *"The simplest tasks are absolutely marred by red tape and forms and things like that…I do not have time for research and teaching."* (Participant 1)
  - *"I am not sure If I am still a lecturer or an administrator" …because there is a lot of admin in ODeL."* (Participant 4).
  - *"The other role, you know I am not the administrator. But I find myself doing a lot of admin work and when students are complaining that they did not get their mark."* (Participant 4).

SUBJECT SPECIALIST

- **Role defined**

  - Knowledge on specialized field
  - DEr able to share their knowledge basis in constructive teaching approaches
  - Keeping up with the latest trends
  - Advocate and encourage lifelong learning
  - Incorporating ODeL specific pedagogies, teaching and learning approaches through the use of online platforms (Shaikh & Khoja, 2014).

- **Data presented**

  - *"For me one is a subject specialist, because I regard that the core of what I should to teaching and equipping students and if we lose that as the centre of what we do and simply become a research centre…"* (Participant 2)
  - *"You have to know your subject and that is not all, you have to know how to teach your subject…"* (Participant 1)
  - *"Well, first thing that come to mind is that I think they must be relevant in their discipline."* (Participant 3)

ODeL TECHNOLOGIST

- **Role defined**

  - Role that DErs adhere to due to context.
  - Core technologies and Marginal technologies (Shelton, 2014)
  - DErs to be on par with tech specifically utilised for teaching and learning in an ODeL context
  - Keeping up with the *"internet of things"*

- **Data presented**

  - *"In a ODL context, as long as we are working with these technological tools, I think in each in every department, we should be sure that all colleagues are able to engage together as a group and knowing how to use them and why we are using them and what we are trying to achieve."* (Participant 2)
  - *"How are we going to use them in order to inform teaching and learning…How to use blogs, you know and those other software's…."* *(Participant 6)*

RESEARCHER

- **Role defined**

  - Most prevalent DE roles (Lentell, 2003)
  - Remain relevant in one's discipline
  - Keep up to date with latest developments
  - Research processes interrupted due to teaching and learning role in DE.

- **Data presented**

  - *"It has shifted over the years…I think previously my main focus was on research and it was due more to the fact that I was fixed on content…So my focus in that point was more on research but not teaching."* (Participant 2)
  - *"Yes, that is very important, I also think every academic in a distance…or any academic in a teaching position as well, that is not purely research, needs to do some research and some reflective research probably regarding their teaching methodology's or rather pedagogies." (Participant 9)*

SELF-DIRECTEDNESS

- **Role defined**

- To teach oneself without guidance from others or support from the institution.
- Use of MOOCs and OER's to upskill within specialized field.
- Lack of time to upskill due to multiple roles on a daily basis

- **Data presented**

- *"It speaks to your locus of control, yourself as locus of control, not your employer, yourself, you have to make it work."* (Participant 5)
- *"...learning from others and secondly becoming use to reading enough to learn what is available...steps to self-directed learning. To know what I have to do to stay on top of things."* (Participant 1)
- *"Yes, there should be a need to continuously develop yourself and explore the tools available."* (Participant 2)

TAKE HOME POINTS

- Competencies in technology and instructional design are going to play a more important role in the future
- Being a subject specialist remains a core competency
- Competencies as a researcher are central to academic and teaching staff
- Self-directedness and reflexive thinking will take on greater importance

"There can be infinite uses of the computer and of new age technology, but if teachers themselves are not able to bring it into the classroom and make it work, then it fails." - Nancy Kassebaum

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