Applying theory to a scenario – what are the basics we need to know?

Let's take an example of an actual question asked for this module. The following is an example of a question asked in the October/November 2008 examination:

The power crisis in South-Africa, with the subsequent load shedding has forced many organisations, both small and large, to alter their business practices. Explain how it is possible for Eskom's practises to affect other businesses in light of the principles of the systems theory.

In answering this question, you have to base your answer on **theory** (from the prescribed book) and then **apply this theory to the scenario** given.

The theory that the question above asks for, is the underline principles of the systems theory. See below how the principles of the systems theory should be mentioned and how it should be applied to the scenario given. The theory (from the prescribed book) is underlined and the application is indicated in *italics*.

- <u>An organisation is an emerging and evolving system of interpersonal roles, norms and rules that govern the cooperative organising behaviour</u>. *This means that Eskom too can be classified as an emerging and ever evolving (changing) system.*

- <u>The theory recognises the significance of interaction between an organisation and its environment.</u> *It is due to this reason that Eskom's practices can affect other organisations (external environment) which it supplies with power, as the internal and external environments interact with one another.*

- <u>The theory focuses on the interrelationships of all the parts in an organisation to create a whole.</u> *This interrelatedness is seen in the scenario where organisations are dependent on the electricity that Eskom supplies. Thus, when Eskom cuts power, all organisations in its external environment are affected.*

- <u>Communication is important to create a whole.</u> *Eskom should therefore communicate clearly to all organisations, for example, the load shedding schedule, so that they can work together as a whole.*

- <u>The more levels of authority in an organisation, the slower and less accurate the communication that flows from the top downwards in the organisation to the other sub-sections</u>. *In Eskom, the various levels of authority in the organisation could thus slow down the communications therein – this is something that the communication practitioner should be mindful of.*

The specific scenario here does not matter – all that matters is that you learn how to apply the aspects of the scenario to the theory that you are presented with from the prescribed book.

Let's look at this one more time, but now let's take Unisa as a scenario (and still discuss the principles of the systems theory). Again, the theory (from the prescribed book) is <u>underlined</u> and the application (to Unisa) is in *italics*.

- <u>An organisation is an emerging and evolving system of interpersonal roles, norms and rules that govern the cooperative organising behaviour.</u> *This means that Unisa too can be classified as an emerging and ever evolving (changing) system.*

- <u>The theory recognises the significance of interaction between an organisation and its environment.</u> *This means that Unisa has to interact with the environment in which it functions – for example when South Africa's political environment changed after democratisation in 1994, Unisa had to make the appropriate changes in the organisation (for example change management structure to include Black Economic Empowerment).*

- <u>The theory focuses on the interrelationships of all the parts in an organisation to create a whole.</u> *The interrelatedness is seen at Unisa, for example in the fact that lecturers have to work in conjunction with the dispatch department in order to get tutorial letters out to students – without lecturers dispatch would have nothing to send, and without dispatch, lecturers would have no way of getting tutorial letters to student – they are thus interrelated.*

- <u>Communication is important to create a whole.</u> *Unisa has to communicate clearly to students (for example) – like when the system was introduced that all students need to apply at the University, before they can register – if Unisa did not Communicate this, no one would know about it, and no one would go through the application process first.*

- <u>The more levels of authority in an organisation, the slower and less accurate the Communication.</u> *If communication at Unisa had to pass through various levels (first the Dean, then the Head of the Communication Department, then the lecturer, then Dispatch etc.) students would receive information a whole lot slower, than if the lecturer just directly communicates to the students – for example through* my*Unisa.*