

LOCATING THE FLEXIBLE LABOUR DISCOURSE IN THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

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A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Management, in the University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Management **(in the field of Public and Development Management)**.

November, 2012

Abstract

The research seeks to explore how Nedlac's social partners understand the constructs of flexible labour and decent work. The study also examines how the views of these social partners influence debates on employment creation. Discourse on flexible labour and decent work has unravelled two policy strands on (a) regulating the labour market or (b) banning certain forms of flexibility. The study assesses how the views of Nedlac's social partners on flexible labour and decent work shape the policy choices they make to ban or regulate flexible employment practices in South Africa.

This is a qualitative research study. Interviews and document reviews were used to collect primary and secondary data respectively. The Nedlac institution was used as an illustrative case study since it has knowledgeable policy developers representing different constituent groups. The research reviewed literature on the definition of labour flexibility while also looking at other thematic areas such as the theories of flexibilisation, the types of labour flexibility, contestations within the labour constituency, employment creation and the flexicurity model as a third way agenda for flexible and decent jobs.

The study reveals that Nedlac's social partners understand flexible labour and decent work in line with the findings from the reviewed literature. However social partners have different views on the contribution of flexibility on employment creation and decent work. The policy options suggested by Nedlac's social partners seem different from a distance. A closer scrutiny identifies that both regulation and banning are done through legislative amendments. The difference between the two policy options is the extent of regulation as other social partners advocate for stringent regulatory measures to limit the abuse of vulnerable workers and others demand a total ban of certain flexible labour practices.

In conclusion, it is the researcher's view that debates on flexible labour and decent work are justified. Discourse on the impact of flexibility on vulnerable workers is important for the regulation of the South African labour market. Policy makers must ensure business efficiency without sacrificing the protection of vulnerable workers. The study reveals that there are a lot of decent work deficits amongst both permanent and temporary forms of employment. The Nedlac's social partners concur that the precursor to decent work is the transformation of temporary jobs into permanent employment through the training and development of temporary assignees.

DECLARATION

I, Thulani Kumalo, declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

THULANI KUMALO

5 November 2012

DEDICATION

To my Father, Mafinqana Kumalo, my wife Chelesani Kumalo, my children Simphiwe and Siphokazi, my brothers and sisters, you were such a great inspiration and source of support and motivation. May God bless you abundantly. FOREVER MORE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals for their support and assistance during the course of this research:

Mr Boaz Mashele and Mr Manene Samela who provided insurmountable support in soliciting funding for my studies and afforded me time off from my work activities to concentrate on the demands of this program.

Professor Thomas Mogale for his invaluable guidance and support as my research supervisor, reviewing and commenting on this research as it progressed.