

**Skills Development in the Gauteng
Construction Industry:
The Case of Mvela Phanda
Construction (Pty) Ltd**

By

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ABSTRACT

As part of its broad strategy to tackle rising unemployment, poverty and to facilitate black economic empowerment, the South African government resolved to promote skills development in the workplace. To this end, the national skills development strategy was introduced. This policy came at a time when organisations were battling to increase productivity in the workplace, due to skills shortage. This hampered economic growth and social development in South Africa. The purpose of this research was to examine the implementation of skills programmes for an empowerment company in the Gauteng construction industry. The study used qualitative research methodology. It was established that management showed optimism regarding the implementation of skills plans, whilst workers felt that practical training and financial incentives lacked. It was concluded that skills development is impeded by poor planning and implementation processes. As a result, it was recommended that these be revised and aligned to improve service delivery.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Public and Development Management at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been published or submitted elsewhere for any other degree in any other University.

SIMON RAMAPEPE

DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my late father, Eliaba, and my grandmother, Maeliaba, who would be more than happy to see the results of their unfailing encouragement of my education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| ABET | Adult Basic Education and Training |
| ASGISA | Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa |
| BEE | Black Economic Empowerment |
| BBBEE | Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment |
| CETA | Construction Education and Training Authority |
| DID | Department of Infrastructure Development |
| EPWP | Expanded Public Works Programmes |
| ETDP | Education Training and Development Practices |
| ETQSBs | Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies |
| FET | Further Education and Training |
| FIFA | Football International Federation Association |
| GETC | General Education and Training Certificate |
| GEM | Global Entrepreneurship Monitor |
| HDGs | Historically Disadvantaged Groups |
| HET | Higher Education and Training |
| HRD | Human Resource Development |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| JIPSA | Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition |
| NACETT | National Advisory Council on Education and Training Targets |
| NSBs | National Standard Bodies |
| NSDS | National Skills Development Strategy |
| NQF | National Qualifications Framework |
| NVQ | National Vocational Quality |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| SDA | Skills Development Act |
| SETAs | Sector Education and Training Authorities |
| SSP | Sector Skills Plan |
| T&D | Training and Development |
| WSP | Workplace Skills Plan |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In the face of rising unemployment levels, crippling poverty, declining productivity, rapid technological changes, increased global competition and low skills levels, South African businesses need to start seeing skills development as both an investment and a basis for enhancing competitive advantage. Research shows that training and development has become critical not only for talent retention, but also for improving productivity and company profitability. Companies that see training as an investment are said to perform better than those that treat training as a cost centre. More importantly, the new training and development/Human Resource Development (HRD) policy and legislative framework in South Africa makes it mandatory for both public and private organisations to implement skills development programmes in their workplaces.

The aim of this chapter is to explain the background, purpose and objectives of the research, which focuses on skills development in the construction industry in Gauteng Province. In short, this chapter describes the context and tone of the study; which is vital if the reader is to appreciate the implementation of skills programmes in the selected organisation.

1.2 Background of the study

The South African labour market has been characterised by imbalances in skills shortages and skewed distribution of income, which have resulted in high levels of unemployment for the majority of the country's citizens. These imbalances emanated in part from the legacy of apartheid, which had resulted in the exclusion of black people (Africans, coloureds, Indians), women and people with disabilities from the mainstream

economy. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report (2006), notes that South Africa still lags behind in skills development and faces serious skills shortages.

The democratic government post-1994 realised that, in order to fight poverty and crime, it had to reduce unemployment significantly. To this end, various policy and legislative measures were mooted and subsequently passed to give effect to the country's democratic constitution which calls for, *inter alia*, equality and eradication of discrimination. To fast-track the entry of historically disadvantaged groups (HDGs) in the economy, the government resolved that Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) would be an ideal vehicle for achieving this goal. This legislation included skills development, equity, ownership, promotion to senior management positions, women's empowerment, and affirmative action measures.

1.3 History and background of the organisation

Respondent B formed Mvela Phanda Construction (Pty) Ltd and Hencetrade 211 (Pty) Ltd in 1971. Mvela Phanda Construction (Pty) Ltd was formed in 1998 and it is a medium-sized company. The company's nature of business includes building construction, civil construction, property management and development, property maintenance, project management and facilitation. In line with Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation and policies, the company is committed to promoting black economic empowerment through equity ownership, management, affirmative action and skills development. The company's skills development programme is under the auspices of the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA). This body regulates the provision and accreditation of skills development programmes in the construction industry as a whole. At the time of conducting this research, the company's skills development programme had been focused primarily on priority skills which included basic skills, medium, advanced and more

advanced skills. The skills programme had a wide scope spanning workers, middle managers, foremen and senior management.

1.4 Policy and legislative context

Education and training is regulated in South Africa by training and skills development legislation. The three main acts, Meyer and Kirsten (2005:71) argue, are the South African Qualifications Authority; the Skills Development Act and Skills Development Levies Act; and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). These are discussed in more detail below and the implication of these interventions for skills development will be linked to the research topic.

1.5 National Skills Development Strategy

The Green Paper for a Skills Development Strategy for Economic and Employment Growth in South Africa published in 1997 stated that the National Skills Development Strategy stood out as the most important policy intervention in South Africa, in that it sought to revolutionise the way in which training and development programmes were packaged and delivered in the workplace. Among other things, the National Skills Development Strategy called for the acceleration of skills development in the workplace to increase productivity and to promote labour mobility and employability and to significantly reduce the persistent skills backlog in most sectors of the economy. Co-operation between government, business and labour was seen as essential in ensuring successful implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy. As a custodian of labour market policies, the Department of Labour has been at the forefront of skills development in South Africa.

According to Erasmus and Van Dyk (1998:20), the necessity for a National Skills Development Strategy for South Africa is explained in the Green Paper for Economic and Employment Growth published in 1997. The

Green Paper maintains that if all South Africans are to participate in economic and social development and their own advancement, they must possess general capabilities (for example, to read and write) and also be able to participate in the international market with its complex technologies and requirements for higher skills, and will therefore require rising levels of applied competency. The vision and core strategy are explained below.

1.5.1 Vision: Skills Development Strategy

The vision is an integrated skills development system which promotes economic and employment growth and social development through a focus on education, training and employment services. The core strategy is to create an enabling environment for expanded strategic investment in skills development. The new system has, as principles the following:

It is demand-oriented: The emphasis is on the skills and competencies required by enterprises to support rising productivity and competitiveness. It also focuses on pre-employment and target group training linked to work experience, to increase chances of employment.

It is flexible and decentralized: Adequate levels of national co-ordination and direction will exist to support localized decision-making and a strategic approach to education and training.

It is based on partnerships: The partnership will exist between the public and private sectors and there will be joint control over the new Skills Development Strategy. Arrangements must be made to share costs (Ibid: 21).

1.5.2 Skills Development Act (1998)

In order to give effect to the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), the government passed the Skills Development Act (SDA) in 1998. This Act sought to facilitate skills development in the workplace by introducing

learnerships, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), creating a national skills fund and requiring all employers to view training as one of the highest priorities in their HRD plans. This Act was amended in 1999 in order to include a vital component, the Skills Levy. In terms of this Amendment, all employers were required to contribute a fixed percentage to the skills fund and to claim grants from the government for all skills development programmes provided to their workforces. The government hoped that the inclusion of skills development grants in the law would provide incentives to employers and thus encourage them to fast-track or invest more in the development of their workforces.

In summary, the Skills Development Act is designed to achieve the following important goals in the national economy: Firstly, the Skills Development Act is intended to develop the skills of the South African workforce. The Act has to:

- provide for learnerships and the financing of skills programmes;
- improve the quality of training programmes;
- encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment;
- encourage employees to participate in learnerships and skills programmes;
- increase financial investment in training;
- provide financial incentives for skills development;
- support a cost/benefit approach to training; and
- provide for the establishment of SETAs.

1.5.3 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment

As its name implies, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act was intended to facilitate the economic empowerment of black people in the national economy. The BBBEE Act No. 53 proposed four vehicles of black economic empowerment: skills development, equity ownership, management, and implementation of affirmative action measures. As can

be seen from this list, it is clear that skills development was part of the government's strategy to address the persistent skills shortages in the national economy. For employers, the skills development component of the Black economic empowerment framework was therefore critical in ensuring their commitment to, and support for, the government's national human resource development strategy.

1.5.4 The South African Qualifications Authority Act

In an effort to regulate the provision and quality of training outcomes, the government introduced the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA) No. 58 of 1995. This Act sought to provide, among other things, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which detailed the guidelines in training and development, including the principles that had to be followed to manage the quality of the training programmes, transfer of credits and administration of training generally, to ensure uniformity. The main purpose of the SAQA is to develop and implement a National Qualifications Framework; monitor and assure quality of qualifications, which is ensured in three ways: quality of qualifications, quality of providers, and quality of assessors (South African Qualifications Authority, 2000:4).

1.5.5 The National Qualifications Framework

As stated above, one of the key components of SAQA was the NQF. The NQF provides the basis for curriculum design by prescribing eight learning levels. Starting from the bottom is NQF level four, which caters for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and other basic learning needs. This framework provides for the integration of learning activities and transferability of credits from one level to another on the NQF. The specific objectives of the NQF as stated in the mission statement above and according to the SAQA are explained.

The framework is primarily intended to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements; to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; to enhance the quality of education and training; to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and to contribute to the full personal development of the nation at large.

Within the South African Qualifications Authority (2000:3), the NQF is essentially a quality assurance system with the development and registration of standards and qualifications as the first important step in implementing a quality education and training system in South Africa. The bodies responsible for generation and recommendation of qualifications and standards are respectively called Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) and National Standard Bodies (NSBs). The bodies responsible for the quality assurance of the standards and qualifications are called Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies. These bodies carry out their duties in co-operation with education training providers and moderating bodies. The following diagram provides some clarity on the bands and levels of the National Qualifications Framework.

Figure 1.1: The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

| LEVELS 2-5: TERTIARY AND RESEARCH | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Research: Professional Degrees | Higher Degrees | Initial Degrees | National and higher diplomas |
| LEVELS 2-4 HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATE | | | |
| Senior training Secondary Schools | Technical Colleges & Community | Private Providers NGOs | Industry Labour RTCs Market |
| LEVEL 1: COMPULSORY | | | |
| Compulsory schooling Level 1 or the General Certificate of Education - GETC Grade 9 Grade 7 Grade 5 | | ABET TRAINING: Level 1 or the General Certificate of Education – GETC ABET 4 ABET 3 ABET 2 ABET 1 | |
| EDUCARE | | | |

Source: Adapted from South African Qualifications Authority (2000:5)

As can be seen from Figure 1.1 above, the NQF consists of eight levels, grouped into three bands. These bands range from general education and training certificate (GET) – covering level 1 and below; further education and training (FET) – which covers levels 2-4; and higher education and training (HET). Level 1 is the least complex, and level 8 the most complex. Both levels 1 and 8 are regarded as open-ended. This means that there is learning below level 1 that will only be recognised by SAQA. In addition, there is also provision for adult learning that falls outside of the NQF. For example, Level 1 has three certification levels for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) which lead into the general education and Training Certificate (ABET 4).

1.5.5.1 Principles of the National Qualifications Framework

The principles of the National Qualifications Framework are:

- to integrate all education and training within a single national framework; to ensure the relevance of education and training to the workplace;
- to assure the credibility and legitimacy of education and training;
- to enhance and assure quality of education and training;
- to provide access to and mobility and progression within career paths;
- to provide a system for the accumulation of credits towards a qualification and recognise prior learning; and
- to contribute to the full personal development of each learner.

Together, these principles constitute the basis for developing and implementing skills development programmes in both formal training institutions and in the workplace. The principle of integration, in particular, is critical here as it emphasises a co-ordinated approach to training and development in the country. This is achieved through the eight NQF levels which, as shown above, allow learners to progress gradually from the lowest level of education up to the highest level. This is ensured through the accumulation of credits after each successful completion of a skills programme or short course by the learner.

From the policies and regulations discussed above, it is evident that the South African government has made significant strides in trying to address labour market inequalities and attendant skills shortages resulting from the legacy of the apartheid system. However, what is not clear at this point is whether these interventions have been able to provide a lasting solution to the skills crisis facing the country. This question is fundamental to this research, as it highlights the need for further investigation into skills development processes in South Africa.

1.6 Problem statement

Although significant progress has been made in other areas of broad-based black economic empowerment, skills development continues to lag

behind; more especially in the construction industry where training efforts have not been able to keep up with the soaring demand for skills. In the Construction Charter (2006:3) it is noted that South African society is characterised by racially based income and social service inequalities. Consequently, the vast majority of South Africans remain excluded from ownership, control and management of productive assets and from access to training in strategic skills. In light of this, skills are crucial in the growth and sustainability of South Africa's economy, hence the study is focusing on skills development in the construction industry, with a particular focus on the Gauteng Province.

The construction industry is increasingly gaining momentum and contributing significantly to the economic growth. Speaking at the launch of the 2008 annual report of government's Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), which is the programme tasked with finding solutions to South Africa's skills shortages, Alan Hirsch, an economist in the South African Presidency, warned that there was a real risk of a decline in investment in training and human resource development in the immediate future. Contributing to the problems that have beset South Africa's skills development programme is the country's poor mathematics and science achievements at school level (Lunsche, 2009:23-25).

This evidence illustrates the scope and gravity of the situation concerning the skills gap, not only in the construction sector but the country as a whole. It is necessary to find out what steps are being followed to implement skills development, particularly in the construction sector. This is of concern since skills play a vital role in accelerating economic growth and social development.

1.7 Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of skills development in the Gauteng construction sector based on a selected case study by focusing on historically disadvantaged groups (Africans,

Indians, Coloureds, women and people with disabilities). As part of black economic empowerment, skills development is designed to facilitate the entry and mobility of historically disadvantaged groups into the national economy.

1.8 Research questions

The study has attempted to address and answer the following questions in relation to skills development in the construction industry in Gauteng:

- To what extent has the construction industry in Gauteng been able to implement skills development programmes?
- What progress, if any, has been made in this regard?
- Are there any constraints that hinder the implementation of skills development programmes in the construction industry in Gauteng?
- What can be done to accelerate skills development programmes in the construction industry in Gauteng?

1.9. Significance of the study

The study may assist Mvela Phanda Construction (Pty) Ltd to understand the strengths and weaknesses of its current skills development programme with a view to future planning and improvement. This understanding may not only be for the benefit of the construction company concerned, but may equip the provincial and national government with the tools and necessary knowledge in construction skills development for the construction industry as a whole.

1.10 Structure of the report

Chapter One: Introduction to the study

The background and purpose of the study are explained, including problem statement, research questions and significance of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A comprehensive review/perusal of relevant literature is undertaken to understand past and current skills development opportunities and constraints in South Africa generally and the construction sector in particular.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

The methodology and approach informing the study is elucidated, followed by the case study and data analysis procedures.

Chapter Four: Presentation of findings

The findings of the research concerning the implementation of skills development in the selected organisation are explained and summarised.

Chapter Five: Analysis and interpretation

This chapter builds on chapter four and provides an in-depth analysis of the results of the study on how skills development was pursued in the selected case study.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and recommendations

Following from the detailed analysis in chapter five, inferences are drawn about the findings of the study linked to the research topic. The critical issues that require urgent attention are identified and the relevant course of action specified.

1.11 Conclusion

The introduction to, and background of, the study were explained. In this way, the contextual issues necessitating the study and the fundamental questions that the research sought to address were highlighted. The following chapter concentrates on literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this section, attention is focused on the literature relating to skills development in the South African context with a view to gaining insight into the skills shortage facing the construction sector, particularly in the Gauteng province. Skills development is part of the government's effort to accelerate the entry, mobility and promotion of blacks (for example; Africans, Indians, Coloureds, and Chinese) to become full participants in the mainstream economy. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:19) the literature helps the researcher to focus on important issues and variables that have a bearing on the research question.

2.2 Definition of concepts

In order to lay the foundation for the literature review process, it is critical to first explain the underlying concept of skills development and related key words. These are considered below.

2.2.1 Skills development

Balshaw and Goldberg (2005:79) define the concept of skills development within the context of broad-based black economic empowerment as follows: skills development refers to the development of core competencies in black people to facilitate their interaction in the strategic business objectives of the organisation, as well as in the mainstream of the economy. This element focuses on core and technical skills that would enable black people to participate meaningfully in the wider economy. In the traditional sense, skills development is synonymous with training.

2.2.2 Training

Bartol and Martin (1994:419) define training and development as a planned effort to facilitate employee learning of job-related behaviours in order to improve employee performance. Similarly, Casio (2003:290) argues that training consists of planned programmes designed to improve performance at the individual, group and/or organisational levels. Improved performance, in turn, implies that there have been measurable changes in knowledge, skill, attitudes, and/or social behaviour.

Furthermore, Beardwell and Holden (1997:379) define training as a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge or skills behaviour through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose, in the work situation, is to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future needs of the organisation.

What is clear from the above definitions is that training needs to be properly planned and co-ordinated to ensure effective learning and transfer of acquired knowledge and skills to the job. For this reason, skills development cannot be left to chance.

Marx, Van Rooyen, Bosch and Reynders (1998:488) describe training as “the systematic and organised process by which the employee acquires the knowledge, skills, attitudes and information necessary to achieve the objectives of the enterprise”. The same authors describe development as a systematic process of training and growth by which the individual acquires and implements knowledge, skills, abilities, insights and attitudes to do the job effectively.

De Cenzo and Robbins (1994:255) argue that training is a learning experience in that it seeks a relatively permanent change in an individual that will improve his or her ability to perform on the job. Training can therefore be regarded as a planned process to modify attitude, knowledge or skilled behaviour through learning experience, so as to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. Its purpose is to

develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future needs of the organisation. Training brings about behaviour changes required to meet management's goals for the organisation. It is thus a major management tool to develop the full effectiveness of the organisation.

Link between education and training

Research shows that education and training reinforce each other. For example, Berry (1995:188-189) points out that training helps workers build their skills, while education helps them to build their knowledge. Training supports the "how" of service delivery and education supports the "why". Education provides a context for skills building. Developing employees' service skills and service knowledge is part of the investment required of companies aspiring to great service. Skills without knowledge, or knowledge without skills, is insufficient. Given this close link between education and training, it is vital that skills programmes be designed in a manner that ensures a fit or compatibility between these mutual activities.

Improvement-related training

In the workplace most training efforts are aimed at helping employees upgrade their skills so that they may perform their jobs well and adjust to new environmental challenges. According to Harrington (1995:275), improvement-related training starts with the basics to help offset the illiteracy problems facing many employees and continues through to help increase the individual's creativity. While survivalist organisations train their people to understand and conform to the procedures, winning organisations train their people to be creative, causing the procedures to be continuously challenged and upgraded.

The most vital point that can be deduced from this view is that apart from enabling workers to improve their knowledge and skills, training may also be a good tool for driving creativity and innovation among employees.

When this happens, service delivery improves and customers become satisfied with the products and services of the organisation.

2.3 Importance of skills development

According to Cherrington (1983:463), training plays a large part in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation. These are some of the tangible benefits attributed to training and development programs: firstly, to improve the quality and quantity of productivity; secondly, to reduce the learning time required to help employees reach acceptable standards of performance; thirdly, to create more favourable attitudes regarding loyalty and co-operation; to satisfy human resource planning requirements; to reduce the number and costs of accidents; and finally, to help employees in their personal development and advancement.

These benefits assist both the individual and the organisation. An effective training programme is an important aid in career planning and is often viewed as a cure for organisational ills. When productivity is low, when absenteeism and turnover are high, and when employees express dissatisfaction, many managers think the obvious solution is a company-wide training programme. Although training programmes do not cure all organisational problems, they certainly have the potential to improve many situations if they are conducted properly (*Ibid*).

2.4 Reasons for training

Leatherman (1999:6-7) cites several issues or problems that may justify training intervention in an organisation and these are, among others, new products or services; policies and regulations, changes in standards, new technology, union activity, employee mobility and additional facilities. In the organisation under review, skills development programmes has been designed to address these challenges and to promote broad-based black economic empowerment.

According to Nel, Van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono and Werner (2004:426), training is executed when current work standards are not maintained, and when this situation can be ascribed to a lack of knowledge, skills, or poor attitudes among individual employees or groups in an organisation. Training is also essential when there is technological innovation in an organisation.

In some instances, training fails to produce the desired results due to the fact that training objectives were not properly designed and communicated prior to, and during, the training process. Leatherman (1999) stresses the importance of setting clear training objectives; and defines a training objective as simply a statement of what we want the participants to be able to do after they have finished the training programme.

To ensure success, training objectives must be based on the principle of "SMART". What this means is that training objectives must be short, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. The study showed that some respondents felt that training did not prepare them enough for their jobs and that they did not know what to do after training. This could be an indication that training goals are either non-existent or not properly communicated to staff prior to the implementation of skills programmes.

Training as a continuous process

Arguing from a service delivery perspective, Berry (1995:189) states that ... service skill and knowledge development is a journey, not a destination, much like service improvement itself. Learning is an unending road with many stops to refresh skills that may have grown stale; to learn new skills required by changing customer expectations, strategies, structures and technologies, to reinforce knowledge about the service role, company, customer, and business environment; to add new knowledge, awareness, and insights; to renew the spirit of serving, to keep the flame lit, to keep the energy level high.

The above statement provides deeper insight into the importance of both training and learning as the basis for enhancing workers' skills and adaptability to rapid changes in the business landscape. This is particularly true for workers involved in the construction industry, which faces high environmental impact technological changes globally.

2.5 Overview of skills development in South Africa

2.5.1 The Outcomes-Based Approach

The South African training system is informed by the theory of outcomes-based education. According to Meyer (2005:71), outcomes-based education and training is different from traditional forms of learning in that the focus is more on the end result or outcome of learning. In other words, the learner must be able to do or perform at the end of a training programme. For example, as Meyer points out, if learners go on a management development learning programme, they must be able to manage a department or section at the end of the course. Another example could be learners who participate in a financial planning training programme. After completing this programme, learners would be expected to develop budget plans. In the past, the focus was more on theory, while

the OBE system emphasises the achievement of competence by means of practice.

Furthermore, under OBE, the emphasis shifts from teaching to learning, from providing information to providing experience, from using normative, paper-based examinations towards outcomes-based assessment as reflected in national registered unit standards. This shift is intended to create empowered individuals who can take control of their own learning and their lives, and also to expand the opportunities for learning and recognition of prior learning. OBE fosters better integration between education received at school and that received at higher education institutions (Van der Westhuizen, 2006/7:104).

2.5.2 Shortcomings

The first problem is that the system is still in its early stages and there are no precedents on which to base decisions. The second problem is that the OBE system requires the realignment of existing training and learning materials to reflect the new unit standards published by SAQA for each learning field. The wide scope and greater methods used in quality assurance is both costly and time-consuming as it involves documentation to be submitted to the relevant SETA for registration and accreditation (*ibid*).

As part of human resource development, skills development is focused on job-related training. The aim of this process is to enable employees to acquire critical job skills that help them to successfully adjust to and perform their jobs competently. It focuses on core employee competencies.

The skills development process in South Africa is viewed from a perspective of black economic empowerment and strives to fulfil the objectives of the NSDS. In implementing skills development programmes, employers follow the sector-specific guidelines set by their respective

education and training authorities (SETAs). These bodies are evenly spread in all sectors of the economy and regulate the provision of skills development in accordance with the rules and procedures set out in the South African Qualifications Act (SAQA). The implementation process is explained below.

2.6 Mandatory requirements

Following the introduction of skills development policies and legislation in South Africa after 1994, a more structured and integrated approach to workplace training emerged. This new 8-level training and development framework prescribes certain requirements which all training providers and employers have to follow when planning and implementing skills development programmes, with the most important explained below.

Sector Skills Plan (SSP)

A sector skills plan provides rich information on the skills challenges facing that particular industry, as well as the critical priority skills that employers and their SETA should address immediately to help increase productivity in the industry. Armed with the sector skills plan, an organisation is able to determine, firstly, its own internal skills needs and, secondly, the skills needs of the sector as a whole. In other words, the SSP constitutes an effective tool for organisations in the different sectors of the economy.

Workplace Skills Plan (WSP)

Using the sector skills plan as a baseline, an employer is able to conduct a skills audit in its own workplace and then develop a workplace skills plan. This plan or tool details the organisation's skills supply and demand and provides the basis for implementing skills development programmes in the organisation.

Alignment of curriculum with SAQA/NQF

This requirement is an attempt by the state to standardize training design so that skills programmes in all industries in the economy have a similar

structure or format. This also enables the government to measure compliance of skills programmes with quality assurance policies and procedures. In practice, aligning an organisation's skills programmes with the NQF means the following: identifying the relevant unit standards first and aligning the design of the training materials with such unit standards and the attendant credits, assessment criteria, and training outcomes.

Registration of skills facilitators, assessors and moderators

The need to have skills facilitators, assessors and moderators formally registered with relevant SETAs in their industries is aimed at ensuring high quality of skills programmes and the outcomes thereof. By outcomes is meant the certificates that learners at each level of the NQF receive after meeting all assessment requirements and obtaining the required number of credits.

Viewed within the context of the study, these requirements are important as they provide the basis for judging the implementation of skills development in the selected organisation (Mvela Phanda).

2.7 Institutional arrangements

The Department of Labour has a dedicated website that provides timely information and guidelines for employers on rules and procedures to follow to ensure effective delivery of training and skills development in the workplace. In addition, each SETA has a sector-specific website that provides employers in that sector with information pertaining to accreditation requirements, assessment and moderation requirements (quality assurance procedures and processes). Employers use these facilities in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating their training programmes. In some sectors or industries, the responsible SETA prescribes the priority skills that employers should target when planning skills development in the construction sector. Priority skills include basic skills, medium, advanced and more advanced skills. Other support

mechanisms include the sector skills plan, workplace skills plans and learnerships. These are discussed in more detail below.

2.8 Opportunities

The skills development environment in South Africa has been characterized by some flexibility in that employers are able to combine their specific business skills needs with the national skills needs prescribed by ASGISA. This balanced approach ensures that productivity in the workplace increases while boosting the skills levels in the national economy. Furthermore, the availability of skills grants in each sector or industry provides incentive for employers to accelerate skills development. Employers who successfully meet all training requirements and produce evidence to that effect are entitled to claim rebates for their training efforts. One major advantage of the grant system is that it helps employers cope with training costs. The availability of advice, support information databases and open lines of communication between employers and the SETAs strengthens the planning process at organisational level where skills development takes place.

2.9 Challenges

Literature suggests that skills development is not a smooth process in South Africa. This statement implies that certain challenges confront employers in the implementation of skills development in their respective workplaces. The first challenge relates to the extensive documentation required from employers before they can deliver the required training, such as accreditation, quality assurance, moderation, assessments, monitoring and evaluation. Each one of these processes requires information from the employer which must be submitted annually to the relevant SETA. As a result, these reporting requirements have meant significant training costs for some companies, particularly in the construction industry where skills development schedules have been very demanding. In some cases, employers have complained about the delays in the processing of grants

and the stringent accreditation processes. These and many other challenges are said to hamper the skills development process in South Africa generally and the construction industry in particular.

2.10 Training investment in South Africa

The average percentage of payroll spent on training among respondents is 3,3 per cent in 2005 and 3,11 per cent in 2006, which is significantly higher than the 1 per cent required by the Skills Development Act. This shows that there is indeed a major focus on training investment as a result of the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act. The higher targets set by the BEE Charter has had a positive impact on the national average attained. Key benchmarks are reflected in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Key benchmarks on training investment

| COMPARATIVE MEASURES USED | United Kingdom | | United States | | South Africa | |
|---|----------------|------|---------------|--------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | 2006 | 2007 | 2006 | 2007 | 2006 | 2007 |
| Number of participating companies | - | 663 | 22 | 221 | 293 | 328 |
| Average percentage of payroll spent on training | - | - | 2,2% | 2,33% | 3,11% | 3,43% |
| Hours of training per employee | - | 40 | 41 | 35 | 25 | 35 |
| Annual training expenditure (1)(2) | £278 | £272 | \$1423 | \$1040 | \$945 R6776 | \$836 R5407 |
| Employee per trainer/HRD staff member | - | - | 274 | 216 | 130 | 135 |
| Percentage of companies using e-learning | 54% | 48% | 36% | 30% | 26% | 30% |
| Percentage of training outsourced | - | - | 25% | 28% | 37% | 38% |

Source: 5th Annual ASTD State of the South African Training Industry Report, 2007. (Kno Res Publishing) (ASTD 2008) (South Africa).

1 The Rand: Dollar exchange rate in 2006 was 7, 17 and Rand: Pound was 13, 23.

2 The Rand: Dollar exchange rate in 2007 was 6, 47 and Rand: Pound was 13, 61

It is evident that South Africa has been slow to embrace a real commitment to vocational education and training, possibly as a result of past government failures. The market has failed the country, as can be seen from the fact that the demand for skills far outweighs the supply. Too often the response of firms has been to poach scarce skills from others rather than to provide training. As a result, the price of scarce skills on the labour market has increased but the skills pool has not increased significantly.

Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk (1998:432) concur with the above view and state that “South African human resources managers are faced with great challenges due to the unique employment situation in South Africa. On the one hand the country is experiencing a serious shortage of skilled employees, while on the other hand a high rate of unemployment prevails among unskilled employees. South Africa is also faced with the enormous challenge of increasing the productivity of lower level workers, addressing

the shortage of highly skilled managers and preparing the workforce for the requirements of the changing global working environment”.

Similarly, Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Schenk (2000:494) argue that the country’s history, technological innovations, competitive pressures, restructuring and downsizing, the low level of literacy and numeracy (especially in the South African context), and the increasing diversity of the workforce are some of the important issues which force organisations to retrain employees and to provide literacy training, thus ensuring that employees are ready to face present challenges.

2.11 Skills development in the Gauteng construction sector

Like all sectors of the economy, the construction sector has focused its attention on skills development, in line with the National Skills Development Strategy and the Skills Development Act. The demand for skills has increased significantly in the construction sector, particularly related to the delivery of infrastructure for hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The measures introduced to achieve skills development goals in the construction sector are presented below.

Skills programmes

The emphasis has been for employers to focus their training effort on building skills through skills programmes. In short, skills programmes are job-related. When a learner completes a skills programme he/she gets credits. When a learner has the right number of credits he/she will get a qualification that is registered in terms of the National Qualification Framework (Department of Labour, 2001:8).

Learnerships

In an effort to reduce the rising rate of unemployment in South Africa, the government has urged employers to provide training to unemployed people, especially the youth. Learnerships, as modelled on the German apprenticeship framework, places a greater emphasis on multi-skilling of young people at school level, which opens opportunities for employment. In terms of the law, a learnership must consist of two elements – a learning component and practical work experience. A learnership must be related to an occupation, and it must lead to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority. All learnerships must be approved by a SETA and be registered with the Department of Labour. The Act requires a written agreement between a learner, an employer (or group of employers) and a training provider or providers. The learnership agreement places obligations on all three parties: the employer must employ the learner for the period defined in the agreement; provide practical work experience; and allow the learner to attend off-the-job education and education sessions (Department of Labour, 2001:8).

2.11 Priority skills in the construction sector

The Construction Sector Education Authority (CETA) has provided all employers in the industry with a list of the priority skills that need to be developed urgently, including technical skills and life skills. Project management, engineering and building skills fall within the first category, while computer literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and HIV/AIDS awareness constitute the last category of priority skills.

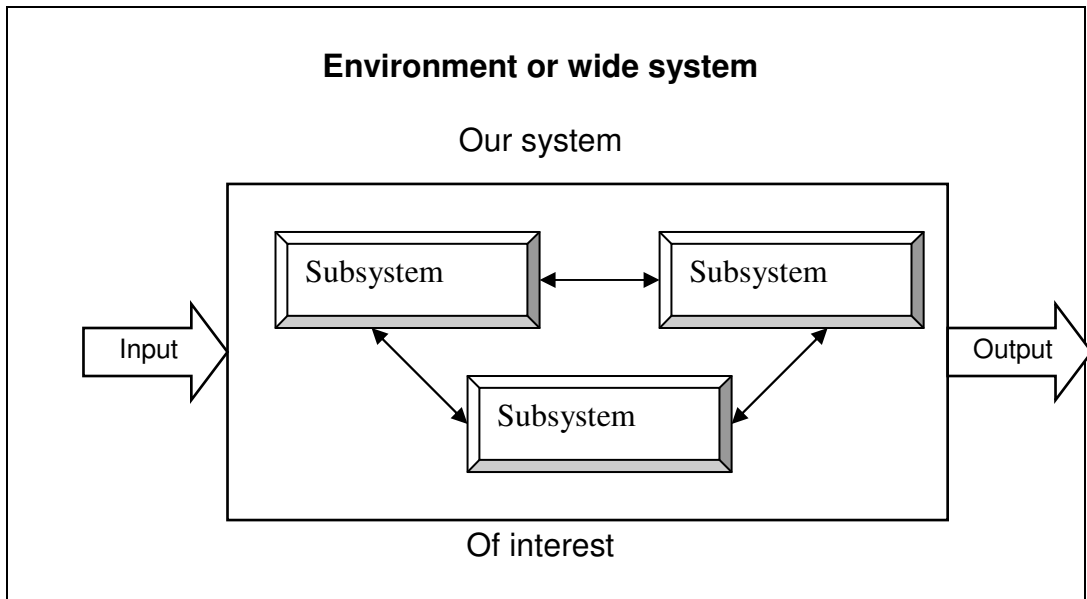
Having considered the skills development system in South Africa, it is now time to examine the theoretical framework on which this research was based. Consideration of theory is important for two reasons: firstly, it provides insight into the concept of training itself, as well as the systems and processes associated with it. Armed with this knowledge, the researcher was in a good position to understand the underlying factors that impeded skills development in the construction industry.

The second reason was that theory provided the researcher with a legitimate basis for judging the findings of the study. In other words, theory made it possible for the researcher to compare and contrast the findings of the study with literature evidence and thus draw reasoned conclusions about the results of the study. The following section provides an overview of the theoretical framework that informed this study.

2.12 Theoretical framework

The basic tenets that underline the systems theory will be presented. In general, a system is defined as “an organisation of pieces which interface or operate together to accomplish the purpose for which they were designed. A system is defined as an integrated set of elements that interact with each other, and the parts in a system are referred to as elements or subsystems (Van Dyk, Nel, Loedolff and Haasbroek, 1997:238). The systems theory is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below; which has been adapted from the authors cited above.

Figure 2.1: Model of basic system



Source: Van Dyk, Nel, Loedolff and Haasbroek (1997:238)

It can be seen that the organisation exists as a subsystem in a broader system. There is interdependence between the organisation and its environment in the sense that the organisation obtains inputs from the environmental system (external environment); which in turn depends on the organisation for outputs (goods and services).

From a training perspective, the inputs that the organisation receives from the external environment may include information resources such as, for example, national skills development policies, strategies and regulations, all of which inform the planning, implementation and evaluation of the organisation's skills development programmes. The outputs (benefits) from the training process for the organisation and the broader environment include a multi-skilled workforce, mobility and employability of skilled personnel, high economic growth and productivity, and improved competitiveness of the country.

2.12.1 Implications for training and development

Thinking in terms of systems helps the designer of training to isolate and define the problem as clearly and effectively as possible. It also helps the trainer to analyse the problem in such a way that he/she can identify possible alternative solutions and strategies. It helps the trainer to choose among the alternatives and to develop the most acceptable combination of solutions. This approach enables the trainer to implement the solution and evaluate its effectiveness and its effect on the training system as a whole. This approach to problem-solving is known as the systems approach. The systems approach is essentially a way of thought, a tendency to think about problems in systems terms. Romiszowski (in Van Dyk, Nel, Loedolff and Haasbroek, 1997:239) states that the systems approach is a methodology which follows five general stages: Problem definition (in systems terms); Analysis (to generate alternatives); Selection and synthesis of an optimal solution; Controlled implementation; And Evaluation and possible revision.

This approach to training implies that the “whole is more than a mere summation of its constituent parts”. The systems approach can be applied to the instructional design process which involves carrying out a number of steps, beginning with the analysis of needs and goals, and ending with an evaluated system of instruction aimed at meeting organisational goals (*Ibid*).

To understand how training should be developed and conducted within an organisation, the first requirement is to appreciate learning theory and approaches to providing learning and development opportunities (Armstrong, 1999:508). This extract provides a point of departure for the discussion undertaken in this section, which revolves around training theory.

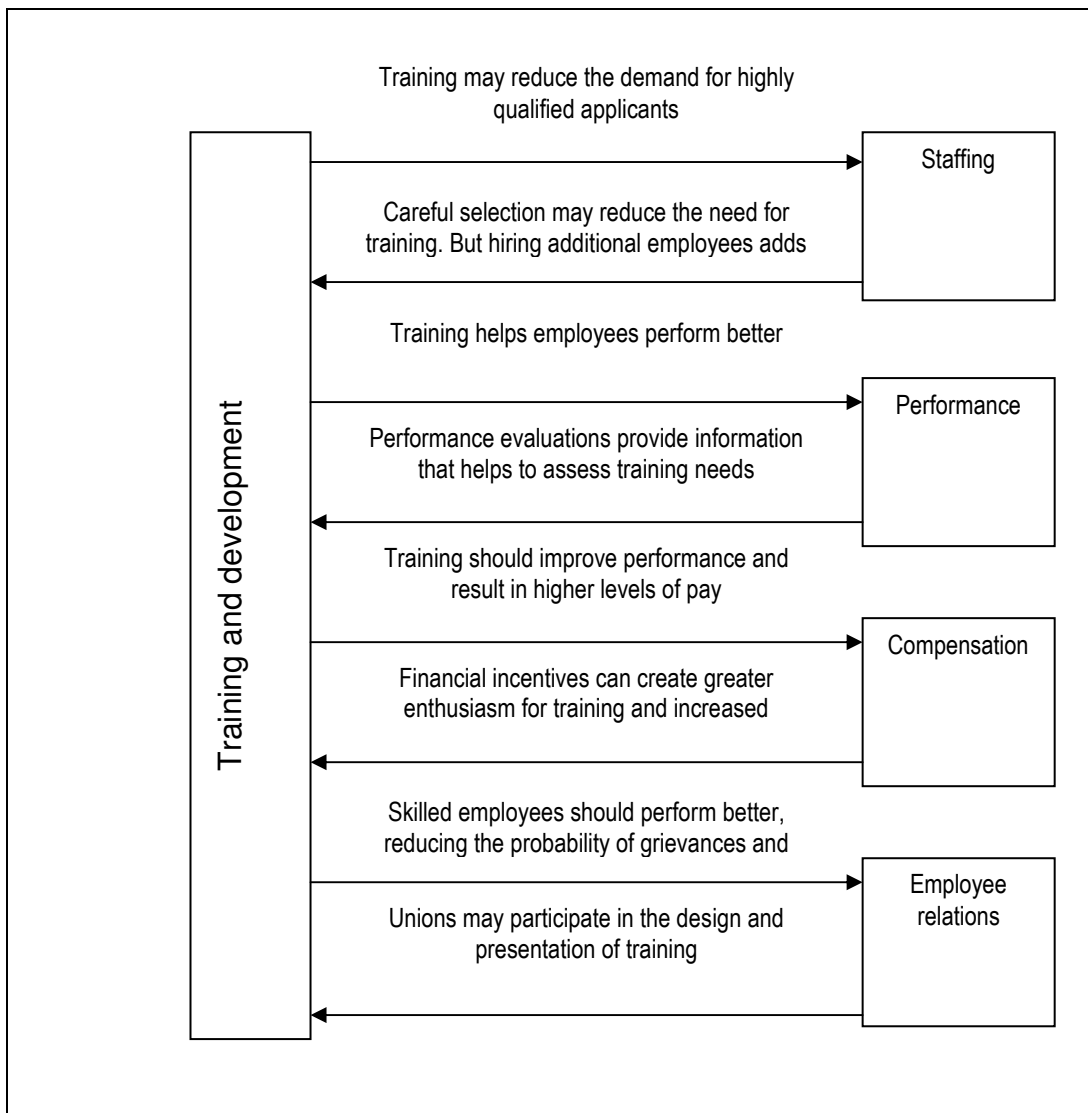
The systems approach theory was adapted from the work of Cherrington (1983:464-469). Training activities do not occur in isolation; they interact

with other personnel functions, especially staffing, performance evaluation, compensation, and employee relations. As illustrated in Figure 2.2 below, each of these personnel activities influences the need for and effectiveness of training and development activities, and they are, in turn, influenced by training and development. Consequently, training activities should be designed and evaluated according to the demands of the overall organisation. An analysis of training and how it interacts with other organisational activities is called a systems approach to training.

With this theory, the organisation is a system comprising a series of interrelated parts or components which are highly interdependent in nature. What this means is that a change in any one of the components of the system (organisation) will inevitably have an impact on the other components. For example, if training programmes are not implemented in a proper way and fail to solve employees' performance problems, productivity in the operations department may suffer and revenue and profits may subsequently decline, forcing the organisation to either retrench workers or shut down completely.

Similarly, when the finance department fails to provide the necessary funds to support skills development initiatives in the organisation, the human resource management function may not be able to meet its strategic goal of providing the organisation with a multi-skilled, flexible workforce. These two examples provide a vivid illustration of the contribution made by the systems approach to understanding the role of training in organisations. The following diagram provides further clarity on the points raised by the systems theory regarding the link between training and other activities in an organisation.

Figure 2.2: Training and development



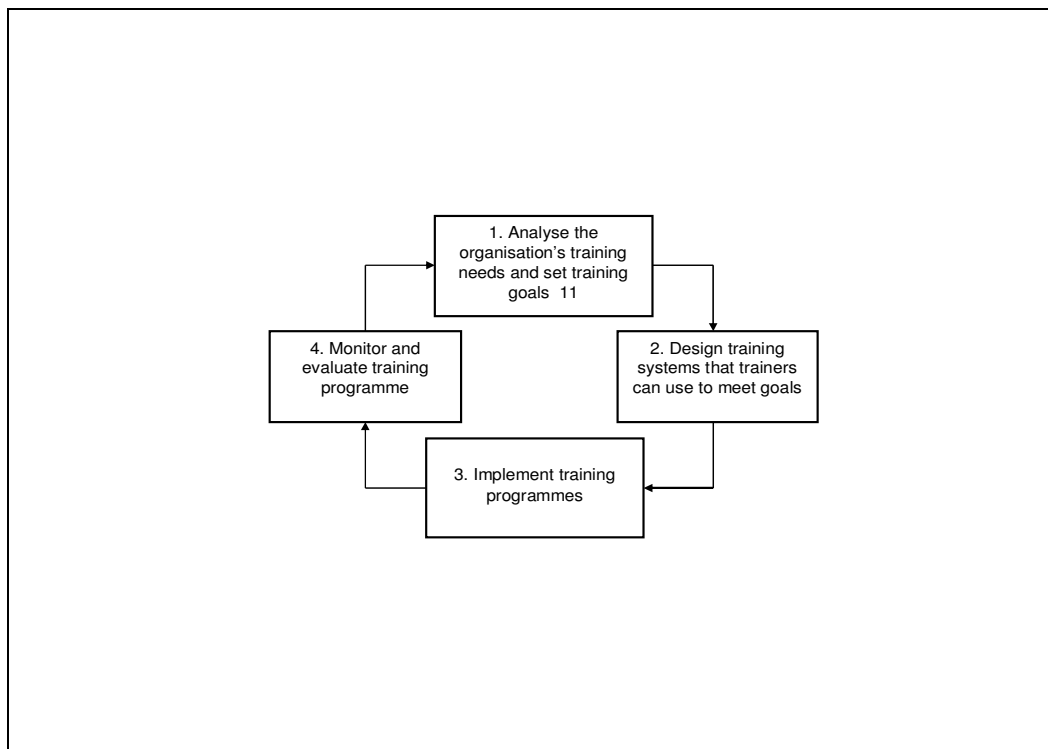
Source: Cherrington (1983)

Based on the systems theory, the above diagram illustrates the interdependence between training and the other human resource management functions, for example, staffing, compensation, performance, employee relations and compensation. What is clear from this diagram is that effective training may enable an organisation to reduce the costs associated with external recruitment and poor performance; and secondly, that performance management may provide the basis for identifying training needs for both the organisation and employees.

2.12.2 A systems approach to training

From a systems theory point of view, training follows five steps and these include: identifying training needs and goals; designing training systems; developing training materials; implementing training programme, and, finally, evaluating the training programme. The following diagram depicts the phases of the training process. Further explanation on each one of these phases follows below the diagram.

Figure 2.3: Systems Theory illustrated



Source: Cherrington (1983)

As shown in Figure 2.3 above, the first phase of training involves analysing the organisation's needs and identify training goals which, when reached, will equip learners with knowledge and skills to meet the organisation's strategic goals. Usually this phase also includes identifying when training should occur and who should attend as learners.

The second phase entails designing a training system which learners and trainers can implement to meet the learning goals, which typically includes identifying learning objectives (which culminate in reaching the learning

goals), needed facilities, necessary funding, course content, lessons and sequence of lessons.

The third phase involves implementation of the training programme. Key decisions in this phase include providing learning materials, putting assessment tools in place; registering course members (trainees), and appointing suitably qualified trainers,

The fourth phase concerns implementation of the training programme, where the main activities include delivering the training, supporting group feedback, clarifying training materials, administering tests and conducting the final evaluation. In addition, this phase may also include administrative activities, such as copying, scheduling facilities, taking attendance data, and obtaining payment from learners.

The fifth phase of the training process is termed training evaluation and involves measuring the effectiveness of the training programme to meet organisational goals. Training evaluation consists of both formative and summative evaluation. The former involves ongoing assessments during the training process to determine if the training is still on track, while the latter is usually conducted at the end of the training to determine the overall effectiveness of the training programme.

2.12.3 Implications for skills development

The systems theory raises several important points which have a direct bearing on the manner in which training is planned, implemented and monitored in organisations.

Firstly, when designing skills programmes, training managers need to take into account the overlaps between training and the other functions or activities of the organisation in order to ensure that there is compatibility between them. This is particularly true for project management, which cuts across various disciplines such as economics, finance, marketing, human resources and engineering. Therefore, using a systems approach to

training design would mean the inclusion of these subjects in the project management curriculum.

Secondly, the systems theory alerts us to the danger of treating training as an isolated activity in the organisation. In other words, it is important to understand that the other functions support training by providing the vital information required to plan and develop a skills programme. Fair rewards provide the inspiration or motivation for employees to attend training. This is particularly true for those organisations that link training with rewards.

Thirdly, the systems theory provides a holistic approach to training in that it seeks to create synergies between training and critical human resources processes such as, for example, performance management, career management, organisational learning, strategy design and implementation.

2.12.4 Benefits of training

According to Amos, Ristow and Ristow (2004:96), the benefits of training and development to a business include the following:

- Increased ability of an employee to do a job;
- Improved employee performance and productivity – employees are able to work more quickly and efficiently;
- Reduced staff turnover and increased motivation – employees often choose to leave a company because they feel they are being poorly managed or supervised. Management and supervisory training and development can alleviate this problem. Employees will also be more satisfied with their jobs and the business if they feel that the business is investing in their development;
- Reduced need to dismiss workers because of incapacity;
- Reduced costs, resulting from less wastage;
- Less supervision is required – employees can complete their tasks on their own and experience achievement motivation;

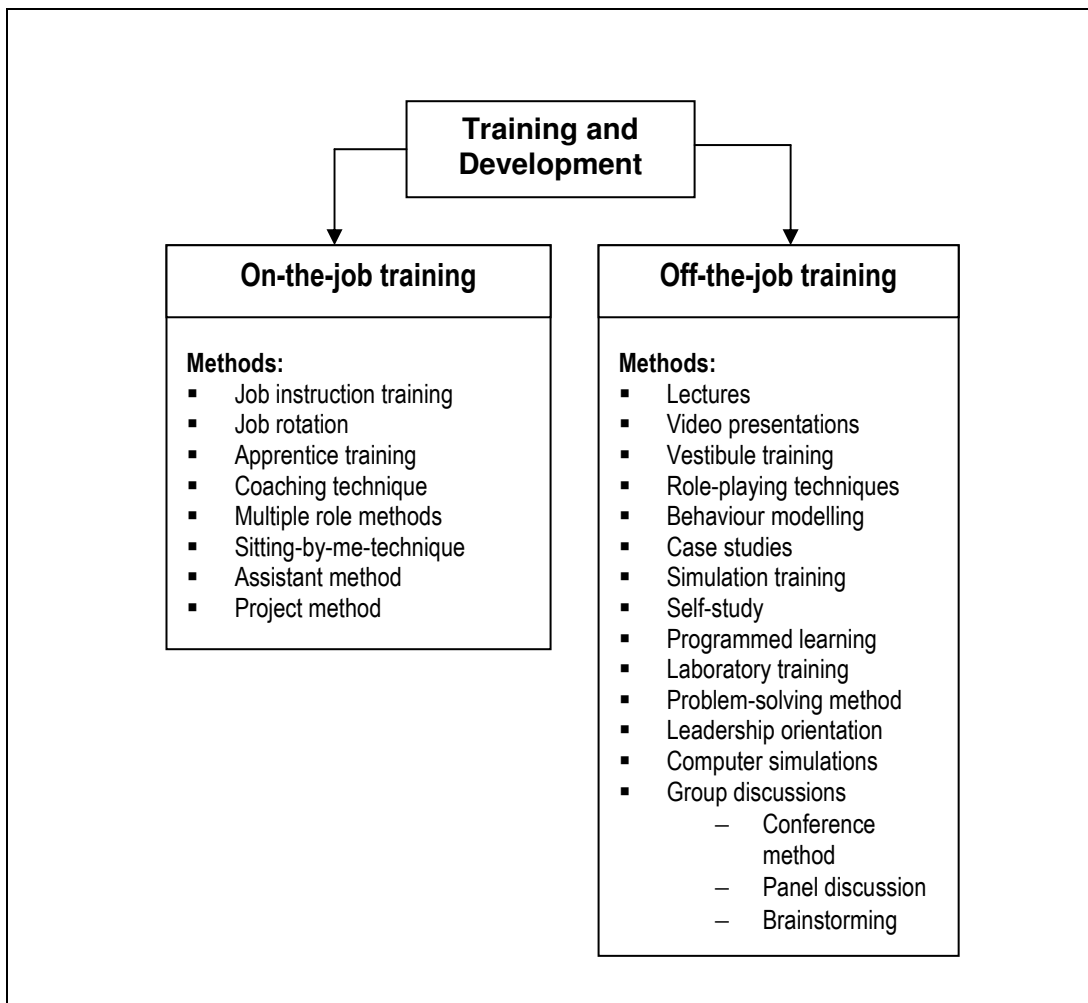
- Reduced breakage of equipment – employees are able to follow instructions;
- The right attitudes are fostered – employees feel competent and good about themselves and their jobs.

Considering the list of potential benefits that may result from a properly planned and executed skills development or training programme, the following points are worth noting. Firstly, training is an effective instrument for building employee competencies over time. Secondly, training may contribute immensely to organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Thirdly, through training, managers an organisation may be able to improve the quality of products and services offered to consumers and/or clients. This applies equally to public institutions.

2.12.5 Training methods

Marx, Van Rooyen, Bosch and Reynders (1998:490) provide an illustration of the training and development methods that are used in the skills development process. These are depicted in Figure 2.4 below.

Figure 2.4 Training and development methods



Source: Marx, Van Rooyen, Bosch and Reynders (1998)

As the above diagram shows, different methods are employed when conducting on-the-job and off-the-job training programmes. However, a distinction needs to be made between training techniques designed for the workforce and those intended for management teams. The distinction between these methods stems from the fact that, traditionally, employees were “trained” while managers were “developed”. In today’s global economy, however, the lines between these two concepts are blurring, as employees at all levels of the organisation have to be multi-skilled in order to cope with rapid technological changes and tough global competition. Job-focused training methods such as job rotation and coaching have always been used to train staff on the shop floor, while methods such as

leadership orientation, case studies and computer simulations have been used to develop managers in organisations.

2.12.6 Factors affecting learning

The literature suggests that discrepancies in learning and practice, or lack thereof, stem from various factors within the training system. For example, Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Dyk and Schenk (2000:507) state that the way in which training practitioners approach teaching may influence the effectiveness of learning. Training practitioners must take note of the following characteristics that may affect optimal teaching style:

Instrumentality – the extent to which the trainee is concerned with the immediate applicability of the concepts and skills being taught.

Scepticism – the extent to which the trainee exhibits a questioning attitude and demands logic, evidence and examples.

Resistance to change – the extent to which the trainee fears the process of moving into the unknown, or the effects which that process may have on him/her.

Attention span – the length of time for which the trainee can focus attention before substantial attentiveness diminishes.

Expectation level – the quality and quantity of training that the trainee requires from the trainer.

Absorption level – the pace at which the trainee expects and can accept new information.

Topical interest – the degree to which the trainee can be expected to have personal (job-relevant) interest in the topic.

Self-confidence – the degree to which the trainee independently and positively views himself or herself, which determines the trainee's need for feedback, reinforcement and success experiences.

Locus of control – the degree to which the trainee perceives that she/he can implement the training successfully when back on the job with or without organisational support.

What can be learnt from these characteristics? Firstly, it is clear that the effectiveness and efficiency of training and learning processes are subject to a wide range of variables which, if not carefully considered may hamper both the quality and outcomes of skills development programmes in an organisation. Secondly, it is clear that most of these factors cover all aspects of the training system, for example, learner readiness, learning activities, relevance and applicability of the training when back at work, and learner motivation. The following paragraph discusses the global perspective on training in order to create the basis for comparative analysis of training systems and practices with those adopted in South Africa generally and the construction industry in particular.

2.13 International perspectives

Like all other fields, training and development is influenced by new global trends and developments. These affect both the approach to, and practice of, training in almost all countries. It is thus important to gain insight into the techniques and practices used by other countries to promote skills development.

This will help to provide lessons that can be utilized to not only bolster the research topic but also to provide the basis for a comparative analysis of skills development in South Africa with other countries. Specific countries that are considered for this purpose here are the United States of America, Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan. These four cases have been adapted from the work of Hendry (1995:415- 423).

2.13.1 United States of America

According to Hendry (1995:416), the American training system is a patchwork of programmes targeted at different clients, financed in different ways, provided by different sources and designed for different purposes. The American training system is characterized by high levels of

fragmentation and differentiation. The emphasis on decentralisation of the public sector and regulated, free market private sector tends to work against the adoption or development of an integrated national performance standards and certification process, which are key to any national training system. Employer-sponsored training in the United States tends to favour white collar workers and not the youth and young adults. The American training system is dominated by few big companies such as IBM, Microsoft and Coca-Cola and these are seen as leaders and role models in the training field. Government has a very limited role in the skills development process, as the country puts more emphasis on the free market system.

Furthermore, the American workforce is growing more slowly and the growth rate will continue to fall, so that employers will have to increase their retraining of older workers. Meanwhile, there is also a growing trend towards greater dependence on skills and credentials acquired externally, less investment by employers themselves, and stronger divisions between higher level employees who enter in this way and less educated workers who are left in low-level jobs in the company or in unemployment outside. In the process, responsibility for receiving training shifts from the employer to employee, which disadvantages those with least initial education and limited financial resources. These trends which are experienced in Europe and America are not conducive to the creation of a high-skill workforce.

The central problem in the American training system is the focus of training on advantaged (employed) elite to the neglect of the (casualised or unemployed) majority. According to Hendry (1995:417), the problem for the United States is not what is spent on training but focus, spread and efficiency. Tax codes subsidize employer-provided training by allowing them to write off investments in training (including trainees' wages). This narrowly-targeted approach conflicts with the needs of the modern economy, which requires a broad base of broadly skilled people. What the American training system lacks, therefore, is a framework for skills, embodying ladders of opportunity.

2.13.2 Germany

Germany is renowned for its well-organised and efficiently implemented apprenticeship system, which creates a learning path from high school right up to industry level. The training system enjoys strong support from government and enforcement is guaranteed at all levels. Every occupation, of which there are around 400 recognised in Germany, has its own focused training scheme, with national standards, syllabii and practical examinations. On leaving school, some 550 000 to 600 000 pupils sign apprenticeship contracts with companies each year. Over a period of two to three years, these apprentices spend three days a week working for the company and two days in the vocational school, divided roughly 50:50 between continuing basic education and the technical aspect of their trade (Hendry, 1995:421).

Furthermore, the German training system receives greater support from local chambers of commerce, which accredit instructors and organise the examinations. The implementation of the German training system relies on the co-operation of government, business, trade unions and schools. The broad scope of the system allows German people to continuously modify, enrich and update their training programmes in accordance with the changes taking place in the business environment.

2.13.3 United Kingdom

In Britain, training in the workplace is based on the National Vocational Quality Standards Framework, which draws from the German apprenticeship model. Skills development is led by the Employer National Advisory Council on Education and Training Targets (Nacett). The NVQ standards provide coherence in vocational training and ensure continuity. Government and businesses work together to promote training in the workplace. There is a greater move towards casualisation which has led to reduction in employment protection for young people. The flexibility

provided by the NVQ ensures portability of qualifications which are occupationally-oriented and must be obtained after the completion of in-house training programmes. This serves as an incentive to local companies as it creates opportunities for rewarding talented employees. Britain's training system emphasises the development of organisation-specific skills and personal qualities. Training is designed to satisfy the unique needs of organisations while at the same time helping people to develop their talents and capabilities in line with their careers.

2.13.4 Japan

The Japanese training system favours strong company-based internal markets. Here, the training environment is characterized by a dual system consisting of employees who enjoy life-long (permanent) employment in multinational companies and a large non-core or secondary labour force in predominantly small to medium firms. In Japan, the effectiveness and efficiency of training is exemplified by the primary sector, which is essentially a closed system where the ties between employer and employees are very strong. The Japanese are highly educated people who place great value on education, and receive a secondary education which is general, cultural and scientific, rather than being narrowly focused on technical and vocational aspects.

More importantly, the inclusion of culture in the training system (close relationship between employer and employee) makes the system strong and sustainable. Here the employee is seen as part of the family and the word "retrenchment" is treated with reservation; the most preferred way of dealing with redundant employees is transferring such employees to sister organisations or strategic partners. In terms of skills development, the Japanese have a vocational education and training system which emphasises face-to-face teaching and communication between co-workers on the job – technology is believed to be best transferred and taught face-to-face, person to person, and skill is best learned by performing the job with co-workers. The resulting emphasis on job-based

training among co-workers has led to a significant reduction of training costs in Japan.

2.14 Implications for skills development in South Africa

Although characterised by high levels of fragmentation and minimal state intervention, some elements of the American training model may prove useful to South Africa generally and the construction sector in particular. This is because the system allows for diversification of training programmes to cover specialized areas in the economy. This high level of specialization is not surprising, given that the United States has a service-driven economy with the largest consumer market in the world.

The Japanese training model is of particular interest here as it reflects traditional employment patterns that have been wiped out by automation in many countries around the world. Training in Japan is boosted by the country's family values, which are transferred to the workplace. In the Japanese work environment, employees are viewed as part of the "family" and this has positive implications for human resource development. Thus, when providing training, Japanese employers think about the long term relationship with the employee; as opposed to retrenchment, which seems to be the norm in South Africa. This long-term orientation ensures that training meets the employee's career goals without compromising his/her obligation to the organisation, i.e. high performance. Job security is a major concern in South Africa, as local companies simultaneously contend with the recession and tough global competition.

The British training model draws from the German model and is characterized by a visible partnership between government and big business. A similar trend has emerged in South Africa, where government, business and labour have agreed to work together to promote skills development in the national economy. The use of training bodies runs parallel to the introduction of sector education authorities in South Africa

which, as stated in chapter one, are responsible for driving skills development in the various sectors of the economy.

The German training model is renowned for its strong emphasis on building skills at school level and obliging employers to provide apprenticeship training to young people who have just completed school. What makes the German model viable is that it is backed by strong enforcement measures. In other words, Germany has adequate capacity to drive the implementation of skills development at the school level, coupled by serious enforcement measures for companies to comply in terms of providing necessary and relevant apprenticeship training to school-leavers.

2.15 Lessons for the Gauteng construction industry

Several lessons may be derived from the four training models discussed in the preceding section. Specifically, the following lessons could play a critical role for skills development in the Gauteng construction industry: Public-private partnerships are needed to boost skills development capacity. Training should not be generic; instead, it should be customized in order to meet the unique needs of organisations in the construction industry. Customisation and diversification is critical in an industry that is largely service-driven. A long-term view, as exemplified by the Japanese training model, is critical in an industry which is regarded as one of the main generators of employment opportunities in South Africa. Such a view would ensure that the industry builds a strong skills base which might have positive spin-offs for related industries. Starting skills development at school level may be a good idea for South Africa, whose education system has come under severe criticism for failing to provide the technical and management skills needed by employers in the economy.

2.16 Conclusion

This chapter focused mainly on training and development literature. The systems theory was regarded as an appropriate framework for enabling

the reader to appreciate the concept of skills development. This theory places greater emphasis on the integration of training or skills development with other functions of the organisation. Lessons from other countries were drawn and assimilated to the South African situation in order to demonstrate how these relate to the research theme and what implications they have for skills development, particularly in the Gauteng construction sector. Based on this, it was inferred that as global competition intensifies, skills development becomes crucial in improving employee performance and organisational efficiency and effectiveness. Training also plays an important role in preparing both the organisation and people for change.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology which provided the basis for gathering and analysing data.

From a systems theory point of view, training consists of three interrelated steps, namely planning, implementation and evaluation. In the planning phase training managers identify training needs and then set training goals based on these needs. The needs analysis process focuses on the strategic needs of the organisation and the career needs of employees. In South Africa, the planning process is expected to result in one important product, namely a workplace skills plan which will provide a full picture of the supply and demand of skills across all occupational levels and categories in the organisation, as well as evidence of the relevant unit standards that the intended skills plan will address when it is finally implemented.

In the second phase (implementation), training goals are translated into practice. Important decisions in this phase include allocating training resources, selecting training methods, appointing trainers, identifying suitable training venues, registering trainees and issuing learning materials to them. As stated in chapter one, implementing skills development in South Africa requires that organisations follow the processes and procedures set out in the National Qualifications Framework.

The last phase of training is designed to determine training efficiency and effectiveness at four levels: learner's reaction to the training programme, amount or degree of learning that has occurred in each learner, transferability of training onto the job, and, finally, the overall impact of training on organisational results or performance.

In the face of tough global competition, rapid technological change and increased consumer demand for high quality products and services, organisations, large and small, have realized that training, if executed properly, can be a major source of competitive advantage. Thus, organisations that cherish this ideal tend to see training as an investment in human capital. These organisations focus their energies on attracting, grooming and retaining their best performing employees and using them to ensure that their key customers are satisfied with their service or product.

The literature suggests that in order for training to be effective, it must be planned and executed properly and supported with the necessary resources and infrastructure, including meaningful support and leadership from top management. Without these preconditions, skills development could become a complete waste of scarce organisational resources.

Skills development in South Africa flows directly from the National Skills Development Strategy and focuses mainly on practical job-related training. This policy document, which was discussed in more detail in chapter one, represents government's commitment to facilitating and promoting skills development in both the public and private sector. At the same time, it is acknowledged that government alone cannot succeed in driving skills development without the other key role-players, for example, big business and the labour movement.

The systems theory views training as an integral part of key human resource activities, for example, performance management, rewards and career management. The most valuable contribution of this theory is that it

seeks to integrate training with other organisational functions – thereby ensuring that the spin-offs from training benefits not just the target department, but the organisation as a whole.

However, to be able to produce the desired results training needs to be closely monitored from time to time. Four levels of training evaluations are considered in this process and these include learners' reaction to the training; learning effectiveness, behaviour change (transferability of training to the job situation). The QF system discussed in the previous chapter informs skills development in South Africa and requires that, inter alia, companies align their skills programmes with applicable unit standards and assessment procedures. Based on this, it follows that training evaluation in the workplace has to follow a structured approach based on NQF principles.

International experience shows that more and more countries are turning to the German system of apprenticeship, which prepares learners for jobs right from school level to technical school level. The United States follows a human capital generating model which tends to benefit white collar workers and disadvantage new entrants in the labour market.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present and explain the research methodology which comprised research design, approach, sampling procedure, data collection techniques and the process followed to present and analyse the data concerning skills development in the Gauteng construction industry.

3.2 Approach

The study was based on the qualitative research method. The reason for selecting this approach was that the researcher was concerned with finding meaning in, and understanding of, the processes undertaken in implementing skills development in the construction industry in Gauteng. It is important to consider the contextual factors in order to make informed conclusions about the implementation processes. This can only be achieved through the use of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers emphasize the importance of social context for understanding the social world. They hold that the meaning of a social action or statement depends, to a large extent, on the context in which it appears (Neuman, 1997:331).

3.3 Research design

According to Welman and Kruger (1999:2), research involves the application of various methods and techniques in order to create scientifically obtained knowledge by using objective methods and procedures. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:11) state that the design of a qualitative study focused on interpretation includes shaping a problem for this type of study, selecting a sample, collecting and analysing data, and

writing up the findings. An understanding of this process is important for assessing the rigor and value of individual reports of research. For the purposes of this research, a case study-based design was followed. With the case study approach, the problem at hand is investigated by selecting a specific and relevant case that represents the majority of the units being studied. As indicated in the background in chapter one, Mvela Phanda constituted the case study for this research.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001:149), within a case study a particular individual, programme, or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time. For example, a medical researcher might study the nature, course and treatment of a rare illness for a particular patient. Sometimes researchers focus on a single case, perhaps because it is unique or exceptional qualities can promote understanding or inform practice for similar situations. In other instances, researchers study two or more cases – often cases that are different in certain key ways – to make comparisons, build theory, or propose generalisations, and such an approach is called a multiple or collective case study.

Mvela Phanda Construction Natalspruit Hospital Contractors Joint Venture is one of the biggest construction works undertaken by the Department of Health in the Kathorus region of the East Rand. The project is worth R860 million and will result in 760 hospital beds. It has a skills development component attached to it from the inception. The researcher felt that this case study would be useful in demonstrating how skills development policy is being implemented in the Gauteng construction industry. According to Merriam (1998:19), a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved. Mvela Phanda Construction Natalspruit Hospital Contractors Joint Venture is an obvious example of such a case study because the skills development programme has been incorporated in the construction works from its inception, and the skills acquired by beneficiaries in this construction work is the main unit of analysis for this research.

3.4 Sampling procedure

In simple terms, a sample represents the selected cases from which the researcher gathers or collects the information required to address the research question or problem statement. In this research, the sample consisted of three representatives of management and four representatives from the company's workforce. Balancing the sample was important for two reasons: firstly, to overcome the problem of bias on how skills development is perceived inside the organisation, and secondly, to ensure fair and accurate reporting of the research findings.

3.5 Data collection strategy

By data collection is meant the process followed to gather information from the respondents. In line with qualitative research principles, the researcher chose interviews for data gathering purposes. Interviews were used on the understanding that when used with care and skill it can be an incomparable data collection technique (Anderson, 1990; Borg, 1963; Cohen and Manion, 1980). The advantage of an interview is that it is a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviews grant the interviewer sufficient opportunity to ask questions, or to probe further where necessary than with any other technique. The interviewer can also detect non-communicative gestures and motives reflecting anger, happiness and anxiety from the facial expression and modify their behaviour accordingly.

In this study, the interview plan was made up of both closed and open-ended questions. While closed questions helped to generate specific, predetermined answers, open-ended questions provided the researcher with the opportunity to collect rich and large quantities of information from participants on the practice of skills development in the selected organisation. Management representatives were interviewed in the company's head office in Centurion, and the interviews with staff representatives was concluded on the construction site of New Natalspruit

Hospital. All the interviews were what Cohen and Manion (1980) call “less formal”. Even though the basic questions that guided the interviews had been drawn up, the researcher was free to modify the questions and to probe further where there was need. Interviews were taped and notes made to ensure that no information was lost or misrepresented.

The interviews conducted may also be viewed in terms of what Anderson (1990) calls “elite interviews”. In these interviews, the researcher was not interested in statistical analysis of large numbers of people who either agreed or disagreed. Instead, the aim was to understand skills development in the construction industry and only those people who were directly affected as well as those instrumental in implementing the particular skills programmes were interviewed.

3.6 Data analysis process

Data analysis from the case study involved screening and classification of facts according to the requirements of the research topic. Information from the tape recorder was decoded and interpreted accordingly. In addition, notes were reviewed, simplified and integrated with the recorded to ensure coherent and comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the findings of the study. In addition, tables and diagrams were used to clarify processes and to enrich the analysis process.

3.7 Validity and reliability

The results of any research project must be validated. The objectivity and reliability of the researcher must be established. The processes used to eliminate bias must be explained. According to Neuman (1997) researchers must be unbiased (for example, neutral and devoid of personal opinion and unsupported views) when applying accepted research techniques and focus on the means or mechanisms of how the social world works (Neuman, 1997:471).

However, Gouldner (1976) quoted in Neuman (1997) argues that “complete value freedom is impossible” (Neuman, 1997:471). This statement is informed by the fact that social researchers are influenced in one way or another by their social context or environment. What is more important is that social researchers have to understand their social responsibility and should always strive to uphold the standards and ethics required by the social sciences.

On the other hand, Manheim (1936) quoted in Neuman (1997) emphasises that social researchers can and should adopt a relational position apart from any other specific social group, yet in touch with all groups. They should be detached or marginal in society, yet have connections with all parts of the society, including those parts that are often overlooked or hidden (Neuman, 1997:471-472).

The understanding is that social researchers should always be aware of their unique position in society. They should have flexibility to operate within and outside a social context as well as the ability to belong to all, as well as the skill to sit back and analyse the situation from a distance.

Mvela Phanda Construction Company is one of the construction companies contracted by the provincial government to build a large new hospital and was randomly selected from among many construction companies.

It is important for a social researcher to remain objective and detached from the process in order to reflect and critically interpret the findings. The desire to uphold the integrity, principles and requirements of social research should always be the driving force behind any social researcher to achieve objectivity and eliminate bias.

The fact that social researchers are influenced by the social context makes it difficult to remove bias completely and a certain degree of bias is inevitable in the researcher’s endeavour to understand and interpret social

reality. Bias is embedded in the values and ideologies of social actors and society from which researchers come. Gouldner (1973:24) confirms this by saying that “there is and can be no value-free sociology. The only choice is between an expression of one’s values, as open and honest as it can be”.

Social researchers have to declare their values, particularly those attached to the research which they are conducting. This will help them understand their role and social responsibility. Their openness and honesty will help them manage the situation of being an “insider and outsider” in a research project and avoid imposing personal values.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The researcher endeavoured to treat the research subjects with utmost “respect and dignity” (Neuman, 1997:196), explaining the nature and purpose of the study as purely academic. In line with good research practice, the researcher respected and protected the rights of the respondents, and issues of confidentiality and anonymity were made clear prior to the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured through the use of symbols rather than full names.

3.9 Limitations of the study

As its name implies, a case study approach is usually focused on a specific research unit or object with clearly marked boundaries. This limited focus means that other important elements of the research phenomenon are not considered in the final analysis. Given this, it is therefore acknowledged that the emphasis on the implementation of skills development in one construction company may not provide a full picture of how other organisations in the industry pursue skills development.

A third limitation of the study was that, due to demanding work commitments, the researcher was compelled to reduce the number of respondents to only seven people. Although manageable, this number

limited the researcher's ability to collect large volumes of data from the respondents. To mitigate these challenges, the researcher used both a tape recorder and notebook and scheduled each interview session to cover at least two hours. This was done after obtaining consent from management and staff of the organisation under review.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology used to collect the data required to address the research problem. Using the qualitative approach as the guiding principle, the researcher collected data from seven respondents. This data was decoded and codified to arrive at meaningful conclusions regarding the implementation of skills development at Mvela Phanda Construction (Pty) Limited. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the data collected from the seven respondents of the select organisation (case study) are presented and explained. This data relates to the implementation of skills development, which was the main focus of the research. The sample from which the data was collected consisted of representatives from the management team and the work force.

In keeping with the principles of confidentiality and privacy, the identities of respondents were protected by using code names, as shown in Table 4.1 below. The interview consisted of both structured (closed) and unstructured (open-ended) questions. This was done to improve the accuracy and quality of the required data. The first and second set of questions was answered by management representatives. The third set of questions was answered by representatives of staff.

Biographical information

Table 4.1 Biographical information

| List of Respondents | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Respondent A | Empowerment co-ordinator- Consultant |
| Respondent B | Managing Director |
| Respondent C | Financial Director |
| Respondent D | Worker |
| Respondent E | Worker |
| Respondent F | Worker |
| Respondent G | Worker |

4.2 Section A: Research Questions and Responses

4.2.1 Familiarity with the National Skills Development Strategy

Respondent A said that he knew about the National Skills Development Strategy and the supporting legislation, pointing to the fact that these were part of the government's effort to drive black economic empowerment in the national economy. The respondent stressed the fact that the company (Mvela Phanda) was "doing everything according to the government's BBBEE policy" (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent B confirmed the inputs given by respondent A above by stating that the organisation was fully aware of the requirements of the NSDS and added that these had been incorporated into the mission of the organisation (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent C also supported the views expressed by respondents A and B. He said that the NSDS and SDA were necessary to equip staff with the right skills, so that they could perform well after training (interview, July 25, 2008).

4.2.2 Organisational Skills Development Plan

Respondent A confirmed the existence of a skills development plan in the organisation and produced a relevant document to prove his point, a copy of which was freely given to the researcher (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent B concurred with the above view and indicated that the existence of a skills development plan was a clear indication of the company's commitment to the government's call for increased multi-skilling of the work force.

Respondent C affirmed the answers provided by the first two respondents above and added that skills development was in the best interests of the company and the country as a whole.

4.2.3 Management participation in skills development

Respondent A agreed that all managers were highly involved in driving the skills development programme in the organisation, and had to comply with this requirement because it was the main positive factor contributing to profitability of the business.

Respondent B made a similar comment and said that it was every manager's responsibility to implement the skills development plan in the organisation.

Respondent C alluded to the fact that a dedicated professional had been appointed to deal specifically with empowerment issues in the organisation – this also included skills development. He said this proved the organisation's commitment to achieving BBBEE goals.

4.2.4 Implementation guidelines

Respondent A confirmed that the organisation had to follow certain guidelines when implementing skills development programmes and said such guidelines involved aligning training materials with applicable unit standards.

Respondent B referred the researcher to the training file, where the training guidelines were clearly explained. Respondent C went further to say that the training guidelines emphasised the need for quick delivery of training programmes in order to meet government's demanding skills development schedule, particularly in the construction sector.

4.2.5 Monitoring of skills development

Respondent A agreed that skills development programmes were being monitored and that such monitoring was part of quality assurance to meet construction, education and training authority (CETA) requirements.

Respondent B confirmed the above statement by referring to two methods which he said were used to monitor and evaluate skills development programmes in the organisation, and these included quarterly reports and selection of accredited training providers.

Respondent C stated that although training was being monitored in the organisation, such efforts were undermined by the fact that some employees came with certificates which were of poor quality, often obtained from unregistered training institutions which were not accredited by the ETDP or by CETA.

4.2.6 Benefits for staff

Respondent A believed that training benefited employees because it gave them knowledge and skills that would in turn enable them to perform well. The respondents also highlighted the fact that the benefits of training had to be seen in terms of its ability to meet the main objectives of the organisation, which are to generate profits for its shareholders and add value for its customers.

Respondent C was of the view that the proof of the benefits of training can only be realised if employees' performance contributes to the company's profitability, otherwise it would not be possible to continue providing training.

Respondent B said that training was expensive and therefore employees had to use the skills acquired from training to improve performance on the job, giving as an example: "an employee should be able to lay 1 000 bricks

per day, instead of only 800 bricks, which was a sign of poor performance” (interview, July 25, 2008).

4.2.7 Management commitment to skills development

Respondent A said that all managers in the organisation were committed to training but added that management commitment alone was not enough – other stakeholders were needed to ensue success – CETA, ETDP, staff, big business, and training providers.

Respondent B was emphatic about management commitment to training, saying that “every manager’s scorecard contained an element of training as one of the key indicators used to measure their performance in the organisation” (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent C stated that managers were eager to see training/ skills development succeed in the organisation but said that this commitment was undermined by negative staff attitudes in some departments where “people are not willing to take full responsibility for their training” (interview, July 25, 2008).

4.2.8 Progress in skills development

Respondent B was positive about the progress made concerning skills development, explaining that some of the people who joined the organisation as bricklayers were subsequently trained and are now part of the management team.

Respondent C stated that the positive rating in the company’s BBEE scorecard, more especially in respect of equity and training, was proof of the fact that the organisation was achieving success in the area of skills development. Respondent A confirmed the views expressed by the two

respondents above by stating that the company has been able to deliver 60 learnerships per year.

4.2.9 Progress in skills development

Respondent A agreed that although some progress had been made in skills development, problems such as lack of funds tended to undermine the company's training efforts. It was further pointed out that support is needed from all key roleplayers including government and business. "Skills development should not be seen as a sole responsibility for companies only" (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent A made a similar observation by stating that there is too much pressure on employers to meet demanding skills development schedules, and this is not possible. The respondent said that, while the company understood the need to meet priority skills targets, it was also concerned about the amount of time required to drive skills development programmes.

Respondent B was concerned about the lack of capacity, saying that it was one of the major hurdles hampering skills development in the organisation.

4.2.10 Employee willingness to participate in skills development

Respondent A said that the majority of employees were eager to take part in training but had to be monitored to do so. Respondent B said that more had to be done to inspire staff to attend training as some of them were unwilling to co-operate.

Respondent C echoed the comments made by the two respondents above by saying that "getting people to buy into skills programmes was a big challenge as some of them were old and only looking forward to

retirement; this has been the major stumbling block that undermines the implementation of ABET programmes in the organisation” (interview, 25 July 2008).

4.2.11 Support from government

Respondent A admitted that support in the form of skills grants is made available to employers. Respondent B stated that the Department of Labour provides guidelines on how companies should develop workplace skills plans. The CETA provides employers with information through the sector skills plan, which gives clear indications with regard to skills supply and demand levels in the construction industry.

Respondent C pointed out that it is not only the government that must provide support to skills development processes, but that this should be a responsibility of all key stakeholders in the construction industry. He said that sharing of resources was critical in ensuring the success of skills programmes in the sector.

4.3 Section B: Unstructured Questions

4.3.1 Implementation of skills programme

According to respondent A, the organisation follows a structured approach to skills development, which consists of in-house training and off-site training where employees are trained on the job by their instructors/supervisors. The respondent further stated that some training programmes are outsourced to external training providers. These sub-contractors are selected based on the criteria set by the construction sector quality assurance (QA), which includes registration and accreditation of facilitators, moderators and assessors. The same respondent summarised the skills development process within the company as follows:

There are certain procedures to be followed by companies. There is a certain contribution to the CETA, department of labour and the skills development board. We have done everything according to CETA requirements. There are certain structures that need the following: basic skills, medium skills, advanced skills and more advanced skills. Also, CETA has their standards for compliance, for example, setting up the foundation and scaffolding erection. Our skills programme is for workers, middle managers, foremen and senior management (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent B pointed out that all skills development programmes are based on the current skills demand inside the organisation as well as the construction sector as a whole:

We train people bearing in mind the skills needs of the company and the industry, because that is what the law says we must do (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent C stated that training starts with planning where potential trainees are identified in each construction work area. Once this has been done, the required training programme is put together and implemented. The last phase of the training process involves evaluating the effectiveness of the training programme. This, he said, is achieved by continuously reporting on the progress made. This is done quarterly.

4.3.2 Goals / objectives of skills programme

Respondent B said that the organisation sees training as an effective tool for improving employee competencies and productivity. The respondent questioned the rationale for continuing to provide training to employees if their performance does not improve as a result of such training.

Respondent A saw training as a means to improve/ increase the profitability of the organisation. Like the first respondent above, this

respondent believed that training should enable the organisation to compete effectively and maximize greater profits on a regular basis.

Respondent C said that the goal of skills development is to enable the organisation to achieve its strategic goals in a timely and cost-effective manner. Asked what he meant by strategic goals, the respondent cited profitability and transformation, for example, black economic empowerment as a major strategic goal of the organisation.

4.3.3 Motivation strategy

Respondent A stated that joint strategic planning sessions were critical in ensuring that managers understand the need for, and value of, training in the organisation. The respondent stated that these meetings provided top management, middle and lower level managers with the opportunity to learn how to drive skills development to support the company's mission.

According to respondent B, one way to motivate managers has been the inclusion of training as one of the key deliverables in managers' scorecards or performance contracts. This he said encouraged all managers to work hard and to start seeing training as a source of profitability for the company.

Respondent C stated that the whole idea of striving to achieve broad-based-black economic empowerment was in itself a major motivating factor among managers, as they knew that skills development benefited not only employees but them as well. "They are the product of skills development themselves" (interview, July 25, 2008).

4.3.4 Responsibility for planning and executing skills programmes

According to Respondent A, training planning activities are carried out by the BBBEE officer in conjunction with human resource officers and line

managers. A lot of consultation takes place during this process in order to elicit views on how best to achieve training targets within limited budgets.

Respondent B confirmed the statement made by another respondent, pointing out that “planning of training initiatives is a joint process involving all levels of the organisation”. However, the respondent could not state whether or not staff members are consulted/involved in the planning process, saying that supervisors know the training needs of their employees.

Respondent C attributed all training planning and execution responsibilities to the BBBEE officer, as he is the person who manages training/skills development in the whole organisation. The respondent did not deny, however, that the whole skills development process involves collaboration. He said that every manager in his/her area is expected to support and drive skills development in line with the prescribed National Qualifications Framework (NQF) unit standards.

4.3.5 Resource requirements

Respondent B pointed out that funds constituted the most important factor in the implementation of skills development programmes. The respondent said that training was very expensive and thus placed added pressure on the organisation’s scarce financial resources. For this reason, trained employees had to add value to the organisation by exceeding their performance targets.

Respondent A stated that successful implementation of skills development depended largely on the co-operation of stakeholders on the construction industry, adding that companies alone could not afford the huge costs associated with skills development – more especially because there are many programmes to be delivered within a short space of time.

Respondent C hinted at the need for role-players to pool resources, noting that skills development can succeed if stakeholders do this, with specific reference made to SETAs. The respondent said SETAs had worked in silos (independently) without integrating their training goals and programmes.

4.3.6 Challenges / Problems

Respondent A was unequivocal about the fact that there were constraints blocking the implementation of skills development plans. One such problem was the lack of financial resources. The second problem was the time constraint arising from the need to complete projects within prescribed time-frames.

Respondent B concurred with the above statement by pointing out that there was a high level of confusion regarding the implementation of skills development, not only in the organisation but in the sector as a whole, because role-players, including training providers, did not understand how the NQF system, unit standards and credit requirements work. The respondent was of the view that the current level of communication is not satisfactory and that this was one of the major factors undermining the implementation of training programmes.

Respondent C cited the lack of accredited training providers as a major problem that delays skills development, not just in the company but in the construction sector as a whole. The respondent said that government policy does not allow construction companies to use non-accredited skills development agencies. Prolonged searches for registered or accredited training providers causes delays in the implementation of skills programmes. Another problem the respondent pointed out was that sometimes people (some employees) privately enrol with unregistered colleges/institutions and obtain poor qualifications which are not aligned to the NQF. "These people will show you this piece of paper and say I qualify

for the job; and there is nothing you can do, you have to recruit them because they have families to look after” (interview, July 25, 2008).

4.3.7 Compliance

Respondent B said that, as a BBBEE-oriented company, Mvela Phanda was obliged to provide training that was consistent with NSDS, SDA, SAQA and the NQF. The respondent said the company measures its compliance levels by adhering to the training schedule prescribed by the CETA, monitoring training on each project site and the rating on its BBBEE scorecard.

Respondent A stated that quality assurance was one of the key requirements of the NQF and for this reason, all the training that the company provides has to fit in with the goals of the NQF. The respondent said this is achieved by following the unit standards prescribed by the CETA and focusing on the priority skills needed by the construction industry as a whole. These included quantity surveyors, project managers, site agents, foremen and land surveyors.

Respondent C stated that screening the qualifications and credentials of training service providers and observing employee performance on the job is of great importance in enhancing the quality of production. The respondent also stated that the company ensures compliance with SDA by firstly holding managers accountable for skills development and screening the credentials of training providers sub-contracted with the company. He said these processes are undertaken as soon as the company gets the tender from the government. The respondent added that all employees were obliged to undergo training on-site and off-site and that their performance on the job was closely monitored.

4.3.8 Need for improvement

There was a common agreement among respondents that a lot still needs to be done to improve the implementation of training both inside and outside the organisation.

In light of the above, Respondent A suggested that key role-players should work together and that government should take action against unregistered and poor quality institutions as they flooded the construction industry with poor qualifications.

Respondent B suggested that government should increase communication on the ground so that all role-players may have a clear understanding of the prescribed unit standards that form the basis of skills development programmes in the construction industry.

Respondent C stated that it is imperative for the companies in the construction sector to provide more training to people living in informal settlements, where the problem/level of illiteracy is still very high. He said that these are the people who face the highest levels of unemployment and poverty in South Africa.

4.3.9 Critical skills needed

Respondent A stated that although engineering, project management and quantity surveying were still the most sought after skills in the construction industry, however, “at the moment scaffolding is a very rare skill. There are very few people to make scaffolding safe. People were injured in Pretoria the previous week because the scaffolding was not erected properly”. The respondent said children at a young age should be taught how the construction business works so that when they join the industry, they are able to learn and adjust quickly.

Respondent A stated that the CETA had provided a list of the priority skills that construction companies had to address and these included basic skills, medium skills, advanced skills, more advanced skills, project management skills and managerial skills. Respondent B also stressed the fact that project management skills were difficult to source, as many construction companies had poached scarce talent in the local labour market.

Respondent C felt that very little had been done in producing quantity surveyors, project managers, site agents, foremen, land surveyors and civil engineers. The respondent added that information, communication and technology (ICT) skills were also needed, since a knowledge of ICT was critical in the construction industry as this technology had a direct impact on the operations and profitability of almost all construction firms in the industry. Once again, the issue of illiteracy was stressed highly by this respondent, saying that a co-ordinated effort was required to provide basic ABET skills.

4.3.10 Steps taken to meet skills needs

Respondent A said that the company was on course to meet its skills needs, and this was being achieved through increased recruitment in informal settlements around the Germiston area, through the provision of both in-house and off-site training, which he said was outsourced to reliable service providers.

Respondent B stated that fast-tracking skills development in the company would require huge capital outlays or expenditures and that given this, a gradual approach was therefore needed to ensure that skills development was balanced against company profitability; otherwise “the company would be forced to shut down”, causing more job losses in the industry which has already been battered by the deep global recession (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent C provided a similar explanation, saying that while the company was mindful of its BBBEE mandate in terms of skills development, at the same time it had a responsibility to generate value for its customers and shareholders respectively. He said in order for the company to meet its training obligations, government and CETA had to provide clear and effective leadership in the execution of skills development programmes.

4.3.11 Skills shortages

According to Respondent A, skills development is not happening as it should. Instead of training, many companies are retrenching people, not because they want to but because of the negative impact of the recession on their profitability and sustainability. Apart from this, there are companies that do not know how to implement the skills development programmes prescribed by the CETA. This causes delays and exacerbates skills shortages in the construction industry. Respondents also noted that “Government support here is needed”, and that “clients put certain criteria that is not implementable, that leads to loss of time, loss of quality. It is not only money, we need participation of all parties, monitoring, realisation of execution to get all that done” (interview, July 25, 2008).

Like the first respondent above, Respondent C expressed pessimism, saying that the heavy reliance on traditional training methods would not alleviate the skills shortage. He felt that people (employees) should be exposed to practical work-related training interventions, which could be achieved by emphasising on-the-job training, and supporting this with coaching and mentoring activities.

Respondent B was more optimistic, explaining that, “on the positive side, young people coming up on the skills development programme are too enthusiastic, those are the ones we will advance but again what we have found is that they are too eager to succeed quickly, they do not want to go through all the prescribed (training) phases. Within eight or twelve weeks,

they want to become managers. They do not want to understand. They think that we want to let them down” (interview, July 25, 2008).

The respondent added that training alone was not enough in addressing the skills challenge, and educational campaigns were needed to mobilize people and the youth about the need for value and of improving their knowledge and skills.

4.3.12 Support from the government

Respondent A confirmed that the company had been receiving support from the Department of Labour. He illustrated his point by citing the opportunity for applying for the skills levy, saying that “you can claim a certain percentage back after successful completion of a training programme” (interview, July 25, 2008).

The respondent added that, despite this positive development (skills grants), the Department of Labour in particular was not effective with regard to the implementation of skills development programmes. They are not familiar with the Special Public Works Programme. They only consider past and existing skills activities, and the standard implementation requirements, which is directly implementing the law and its requirements. “The gazetted Ministerial Determination and Special works programme needs to be attached to labour. The provision is made to increase productivity specifically linked to EPWP” (interview, July 25, 2008).

4.4 Section C: Employees

Four respondents were selected from the organisation’s work force for the interviews. These included two bricklayers and two maintenance workers. To ensure consistency, the code names were used to protect the identities and privacy of these respondents and were linked with those of the first group (management representatives respondents A, B and C and the workers D, E, F and G respectively).

It should be noted that the interviews for workers took place at the Mvela Phanda construction site in Natalspruit on August 1, 2008. The following questions and responses are a reflection of what ensued throughout the interview session.

4.4.1 Participation in skills development programme

Respondent D stated that he did participate in skills development programmes, but indicated that he was not satisfied or happy with the manner in which the training was being administered or implemented because their efforts were not rewarded by the company.

Similarly, Respondent E pointed out that although he attended training courses, these did not help him because after the training, he was placed in a different job for which he had little knowledge and experience. He said this made work very difficult for him as he could not apply the learnt skills on the new job.

Respondent F admitted having attended skills development programmes, but said that these programmes were short and did not provide for further training opportunities, “as most of us want to gain access to formal qualification”. The respondent felt that management support was not enough (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent G was more enthusiastic about the training than the other three respondents, saying it gave him the opportunity to improve his skills background and profile. However, the same respondent raised concerns about the company’s failure to provide incentives to those employees who successfully completed the training programme, and criticised the company’s over-emphasis on profitability.

4.4.2 Skills development incentives / rewards

Respondent D did not hesitate to say that “staff did not benefit from the training”. He said after training, people were not incentivised or promoted to better or senior jobs – “you still do the same job even after you have received the right training” (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent E expressed a similar concern, saying that skills development is merely done to ensure that the company met its BBBEE compliance requirements. He said this disadvantaged many employees and forced them to leave the company, as they did not see the value of the training offered. He said people expected training to propel them to new positions that had better pay and fringe benefits.

Respondent F denied having received incentives or rewards for the training he had undergone. Once again, the respondent attributed the problem to the lack of management support for employees. He said that promises made prior to the training (e.g. promotional opportunities) are not honoured after the training. He said the lack of support demotivated or discouraged many employees from attending the training.

Interestingly, Respondent F saw training not only as a means to earn additional income, but also as a tool to improve one’s future career prospects. He said that although he was disappointed by the lack of incentives, he was glad that the training he had received would enable him to get other jobs in the construction industry.

Respondent G saw the benefit or reward of training in terms of job security, saying that although no financial incentives were attached to the training, the knowledge and skills he had acquired would help him improve his performance and thus place him in a good position to keep his job in the company.

4.4.3 Problems in skills development

Respondent D made it clear that skills development was not achieving the desired goals in the company, as employees were not part of the planning process. He said that employees were not consulted but rather “informed” about available training opportunities. This prevented employees from stating their training needs in a useful manner. This was one of the major problems that retarded skills development in the company (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent F said the reason why training was not producing good results was that the programmes offered lacked continuity and as a result, people did not see the benefits of attending short courses now and then. In addition, the respondent pointed out that management should not assume that employees know how the credit system on the National Qualification Framework works, “because a lot of people want to train but do not know how many or what credits to attain in order to acquire a formal qualification after the training” (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent G said that tight work schedules prevented many employees from attending training and as a result, some of them have not acquired new skills or have not benefited from skills development. He suggested that flexible working hours were needed to enable staff members to attend training.

4.4.4 Possible solutions

Respondent D suggested that skills development can be fast-tracked by involving and eliciting the inputs of staff members early. “If employees’ training needs are identified and addressed early, all employees would certainly attend training” (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent E was of the view that constraints impeding training could be alleviated if management kept their promises after training session and

placed people in the right jobs, where they may be able to practice learnt knowledge and skills.

Respondent F suggested that, in order to reduce or address the backlog in skills development, management would have to increase communication with staff and make them realise how important the training would be for their careers. In this way, employees would be motivated to attend training.

Respondent G suggested that employees should be given reasonable time to prepare for and to attend skills development, more especially those that were involved in highly demanding construction projects like building/bricklaying.

4.4.5 Completion / non-completion of skills programmes

Respondent D pointed out that most people in his department usually complete training courses but said the problem was that after training, they were not given the opportunity to showcase or test their skills, and as a result “there is no difference between trained and untrained employees” (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent E stated that, although many people in her unit attended the training, some of them left such programmes because they did not address their future career needs or because they were rather “too basic or simple in nature” (interview, August 1, 2008).

Respondent F stated that most people who had attended training in her department often complained about the lack of depth in these courses. This concern confirms the view expressed by Respondent E above that some of these courses are too basic or simple, especially for those members of staff who already had some professional qualifications or certificates. He said this was probably why some people left the programme.

Respondent G indicated that people in his unit attended training and said that he was not aware of people who have left the training programme before completion. However, the respondent made it clear that he was not denying the fact that some people in other departments had stopped attending skills development programmes for certain reasons.

4.5 Summary of findings

The findings of the research have shown that Mvela Phanda is involved in skills development and that the training programmes cover both management and staff. Such skills development programmes have been aligned with the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework, more especially in the area of unit standards and credits.

To a large extent, the organisation complies with applicable policies and legislation concerning the implementation of skills development programmes. As pointed out in chapter one, skills development policies and legislation include, among others, the National Skills Development Strategy, the Skills Development Act and the National Qualifications Framework. This was evidenced by the training programmes, which had been fully aligned with the NQF in terms of unit standard titles, credits and assessments. All training initiatives were based on CETA guidelines.

With regard to implementation, the organisation uses a dual approach to training, which involves the use of both on-site and off-site training interventions. This dual approach enables the organisation to meet the comprehensive training schedule prescribed by the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) for all construction companies. Service providers are identified and selected on the basis of their ability to comply with NQF requirements.

Several problems affected the implementation of skills development programmes in the selected organisation. These ranged from lack of

funds, negative perceptions about training, confusion about the workings of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the associated unit standards and credit system. The overall feeling was that training service providers do not have the full understanding of these training requirements and that communication and the train-the-trainer interventions had to be strengthened on the ground.

Skills development initiatives in the organisation have been linked with performance management. The management philosophy is that training should lead to greater improvement in both staff performance and productivity. However, the major shortcoming in this regard is the fact that when employees come back from training they are not placed in the right job context so that they are able to test and demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge and skills

Monitoring and evaluation of skills development programmes consists of quarterly reports and monitoring of performance on the job; and thus far management feels that the training has not helped increase employee performance as people are still not able to meet their targets. For example, some employees still could not meet their performance targets like laying 800 or 1 000 bricks a day despite having obtained valid certificates from the skills training programmes they attended.

The strong profit orientation tends to hamper human resource development. Management is under tremendous pressure to break even and to generate more profits in the highly competitive construction sector. Participants from the shop floor (ordinary employees) felt that this approach severely disadvantaged staff, as profits came before their careers.

Perceptions about the importance of skills development differed widely between management and employees. While management saw the goal of training as that of improving employee performance and contributing to the bottom line profit margin, employees on the other hand viewed training

as a vehicle for improving their salaries and careers respectively. There was a strong feeling (among the worker respondents) that the skills development process had to lead to these benefits, otherwise training would be a waste of time and money.

To some extent, skills development is also hampered by the negative attitudes that prevail among some staff members, who are no longer prepared to take part in training due to reasons such as lack of promotional opportunities and management's inability to provide incentives for those employees who successfully complete training on time.

The results also revealed that there is a wide communication gap between management and employees regarding skills development. Although management signalled good intentions about its commitment to empowerment issues, this commitment was overshadowed by its inability to create a favourable climate where employees have the opportunity to meaningfully showcase the skills and knowledge that they have acquired through training. Had the expectations of employees been addressed prior to the implementation of the skills programmes, trainees would have been in a better position to understand why they had to undergo training in the first place, and what benefits would subsequently accrue to them as a result of such training. Consequently, ineffective communication has resulted in uncertainty and frustration on the side of employees, who felt that "management was not taking their concerns seriously" (interview, August 1, 2008).

4.6 Conclusion

The findings of the study concerning the execution of skills development in the case study were presented and explained in detail. The key issues emanating from these findings were summarised above. The next chapter analyses the main findings of the study.

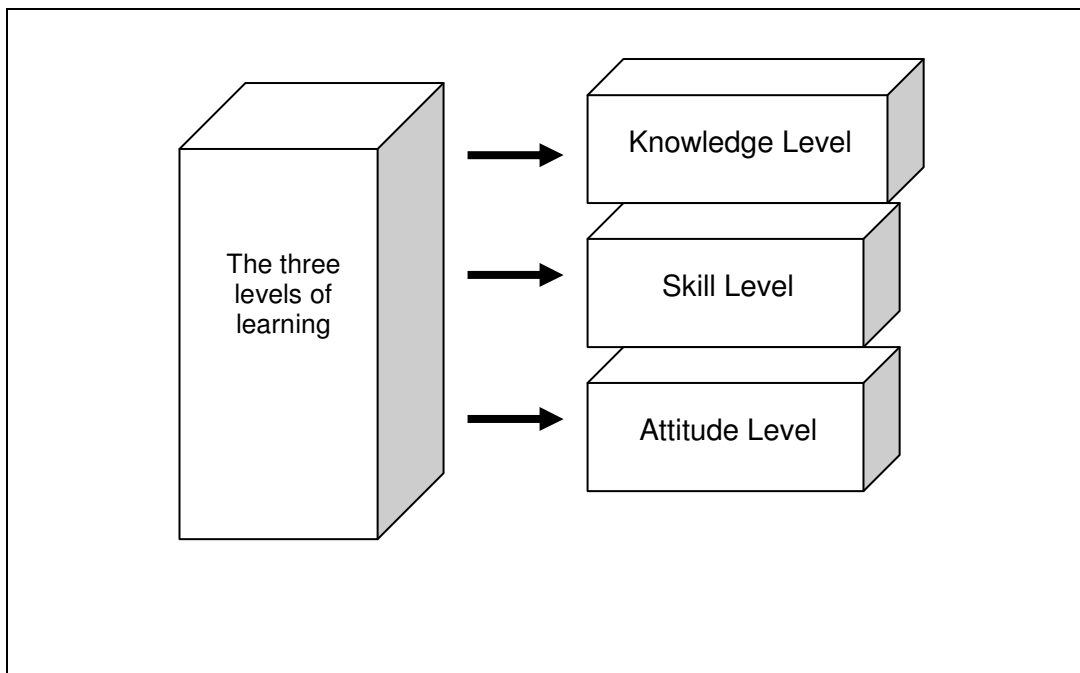
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the research findings as presented in chapter four. For simplicity, the analysis is done under the following major topics which form the core of the chapter: skills development process, employee perspectives, and monitoring and evaluation.

Figure 5.1 Three levels of learning



Source: Adapted from Kirkpatrick (1971:40).

As Figure 5.1 shows, there are three levels of learning, namely, knowledge level, skill level and attitude level. These three levels, explained below, have far-reaching implications for the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of skills development programmes in the workplace.

Knowledge level: The first level of learning involves knowledge. According to Kirkpatrick (1971), this level of learning may be achieved

through managing, conditioning, one-way communication, or similar approaches. It should not be confused with application of the knowledge.

Skill Level: The second level of learning requires adaptation and practice. Being able to convert intentions and knowledge into practical knowledge requires learning in the “action” context and will utilise role-playing, skills practices, video-type feedback, as well as practice and other action-oriented methods of learning.

Attitude Level: This level of learning is more concerned with perceptions, past experiences, and values. Learning which produces changes in attitude is much harder to achieve as it will require more sophisticated methods such as confrontation learning, laboratory training, or sensory experiences.

According to Kirkpatrick (1971), these three levels of learning must be considered if we are to achieve and maintain performance change as a result of training and development activity.

Following from chapter four, which focused on data presentation, this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of such findings in order to gain considerable insight into the issues retarding skills development in the Gauteng construction industry. This goal is achieved in the ensuing paragraphs.

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:23), data analysis in a qualitative inquiry involves a twofold approach. The first aspect involves data analysis at the research site during data collection. The second aspect involves data analysis away from the site following a period of data collection. Note that this second aspect is conducted between site visits prior to, as well as after, completion of data collection. Neuman (2000:417) states that qualitative data are in the form of text, written words, phrases, or symbols describing or representing people, actions, and events in social life.

According to Lynton and Pareek (1990:x) better evaluation could check the perversions, ineffectiveness, and excessive costs of many training programmes. Management of Mvela Phanda (Pty) Limited identified the need to contribute to the skills development in the construction sector by placing staff in the training programmes which would improve the productivity and quality of production in the construction sector as a whole.

Management of Mvela Phanda (Pty) Limited identified the need to improve productivity. They started by identifying the three phases in the training process. As stated by Lynton and Pareek (1990:57), the first stage is pre-training, which involves the understanding of the situation that requires intervention, and identifies the performance to be improved. The second stage involves the training itself. The participants have to be prepared and willing to learn, and ready to take on new knowledge which would make the difference at the practical work stations after completion. The final stage is post-training, where once the training is concluded, things should be different, participants should feel empowered and energised to perform their daily work tasks differently and better.

5.2 Knowledge of NSDS and applicable legislation

Following from the results in chapter four, there is no doubt that the entire management team of Mvela Phanda Construction is fully conversant with the requirement of the NSDS, NQF and skills development. This knowledge has enabled the company to develop training interventions that are consistent with the requirements of the Skills Development Act and ensure compatibility with sector skills needs. Moreover, this has also enabled the company to meet its BBBEE targets in the area of training, which is one of the four empowerment tools – equity, promotion, skills development and affirmative action. Training materials content was aligned with applicable unit standards, which covered the following skills needs: basic skills, medium skills, advanced skills and more advanced skills.

5.2.1 Training goals

Training goals refer to the measurable outcome that training seeks to achieve. In terms of the systems approach theory, which was discussed in more detail in chapter two, training goals are set during the first phase of the training process, namely planning. According to Brown and Harvey (2006:346), “goal-setting is a process intended to increase efficiency and effectiveness by specifying the desired outcomes toward which individuals, teams and the organisations should work”. Coetzee (2002:108) points out that involvement of employees in goal setting “gives meaning to an individual’s life because it gives him/her something to strive for and focuses efforts. Goal oriented people find the right way very easily, because they know exactly where they are heading”.

Asked what the goals of training were in the selected organisation, Respondent A from management explained that “the goals are to satisfy our company needs, requirements. There is no need to train somebody where your company is not going to benefit” (interview, July 25, 2008).

“The directive comes from management. It is our duty. We are committed to transfer skills for the future. It is part of our duty to do better. We are implementing things that are gazetted” (Respondent A, July 25, 2008).

Based on the foregoing, the goals of training may be summarised as follows.

Table 5.1: Goals of training

| Training goals |
|---------------------------------|
| To improve employee performance |
| To Increase company profits |
| To transfer skills to employees |

Source: Own compilation, 2009

There are three goals that training must satisfy in the organisation, and these are based on the perspective of management regarding the role that training should play in the organisation. The emphasis on the need for training to enhance staff performance is consistent with the literature evidence presented in Figure 2. 2, in Chapter Two, which illustrates the relationship between training and employee performance. It was argued that effective training may help people improve their skills and knowledge and thus perform better on their jobs.

The second goal of training depicted above is profit maximisation. If training does not contribute to the bottom line (profit margins), then it may be declared null and void, because as respondent A further pointed out, training is “an expensive exercise that must create value for the company and its shareholders”. This finding is consistent with the point raised by Kirkpatrick (in Fisher, Schoenfeldt and Shaw, 1993), as discussed in chapter two, that training effectiveness is also seen in terms of its ability to contribute to overall organisational results.

The third goal of training should be the transfer of skills to employees in the long term. As an empowerment company, Mvela Phanda is obliged to demonstrate its full commitment to fulfilling the mission of the skills development strategy, which, as outlined in chapter one, is to promote economic productivity through multi-skilling of the country’s workforce.

However, this contrasts sharply with the views expressed by employees concerning skills development in the organisation. There was a feeling that

management only sees the value of training in terms of profit maximisation. This narrow focus prevents the organisation from realising the strategic importance of training – particularly with regard to talent management. By talent management is meant the effort aimed at attracting, grooming, developing, rewarding and retaining talented employees in the organisation.

According to Mabey and Salaman (1995:143), training has a strategic purpose. Many organisations have gone to the point of recognising that training and development is a strategic priority rather than a tactical or knee-jerk response, but choices still remain as to direct investment and to what end? A common conception of strategic training and development is to see it as a means to assess and address skills deficiencies in the organisation. Therefore, the lack of a strategic approach to training means that training results are only seen or viewed in terms of company profitability. According to Armstrong (1998), no organisation can survive without its most valuable assets – its people.

According to Armstrong (1999:35), the fundamental aim of training is to help the organisation achieve its purpose by adding value to its key resources – the people it employs. Training means investing in people to enable them to perform better and to empower them to make best use of their natural abilities. The particular objectives of training are; firstly to develop the competencies of employees and improve their performance; secondly to help people grow within the organisation in order that, as far as possible, its future needs for human resources can be met from within; at the same time reduce the learning time for employees starting in new jobs on appointment, transfer or promotion, and ensure that they become fully competent as quickly and economically as possible.

Carrell, Frank, Kuzmits and Elbert (1992:300) take the above stated point further and argue that training is important in the achievement of organisational objectives. Through training, employees gain skills, abilities, knowledge, and attitudes that help them perform more effectively in

present and future jobs. As such, training may be considered an investment in human resources that will provide many important benefits and returns to the organisation.

This view is confirmed by the findings of the study, which have shown that training should not only be aimed at profit maximisation, but rather, the nurturing and retention of talented employees. Therefore, the concern raised by employees regarding the lack of compatibility between training and career management is a clear indication that the current training approach is not adequately balanced.

Armstrong (1999:509) point out that organisations with a positive training philosophy understand that they live in a world where competitive advantage is achieved by having higher-quality people than other firms employ, and that this need will not be satisfied unless they invest in developing the skills and competence of their people. They also recognise that actual or potential skills shortages can threaten their future prosperity and growth. In hard commercial terms, these firms persuade themselves that training is an investment that will pay off. They understand that it may be difficult to calculate the return on that investment but they believe that the tangible and intangible benefits of training, as described earlier in this chapter, will more than justify the cost.

5.3 Programme implementation

According to Buckley and Capple (1995:32), the selection of, or the systematic design and development of training content is no guarantee of success; training programmes have to be delivered properly. This statement highlights the purpose of this section, which examines closely the process followed to implement skills programmes at Mvela Phanda. In this context, the word implementation refers to the process whereby training plans are translated into meaningful outcomes. At Mvela Phanda Construction, the implementation of skills development programmes is based on a dual approach, which practically involves in-house and off-site

training strategies. The following table shows the key training methods involved in each of these two approaches.

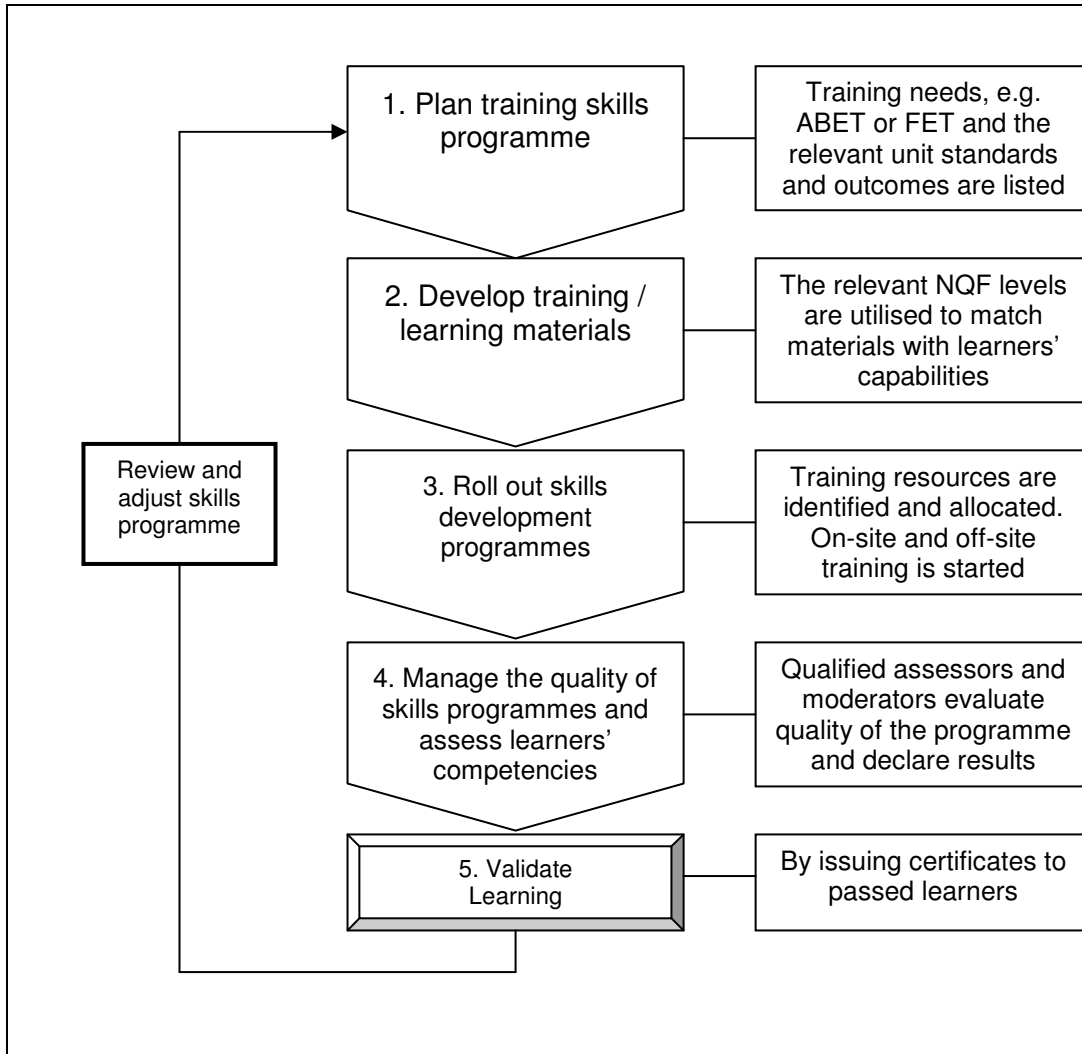
Table 5.2: Two training approaches

| In-house training activities | Off-site training activities |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coaching ▪ Job-based demonstrations ▪ Mentoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lectures ▪ Demonstrations ▪ Simulations |

Source: Own compilation (2009)

Table 5.2 above illustrates the two skills development approaches adopted by the organisation to provide much needed training to its workforce. Each one of these approaches consists of particular training interventions. For example, while in-house training includes coaching, job rotation and mentoring, off-site training activities on the other hand, encompass lectures, demonstrations held in remote construction sites and simulations. The following process map, which is based on the explanation provided by respondent A, illustrates the key steps followed to roll out skills programmes at Mvela Phanda.

Figure 5.2: The skills development process



Source: Own compilation (2009)

Based on Figure 5.2 above, the skills development process at Mvela Phanda construction starts with planning, which involves identifying training needs within the context of the National Qualifications Framework. In this step, the relevant unit standard title, together with the associated credits and outcomes, is identified.

In the second step, which entails designing training and/or learning materials, the relevant NQF levels are identified. The purpose of this exercise is to align stakeholders' unique learning capabilities and wants,

so that they are able to easily interact with and gain quick understanding of such materials during the learning process.

The third step in the skills development process involves translating the skills plan into action. Here, the training budget, which Respondent A said was approximately R2,7 million per annum, is allocated according to the training needs of the organisation, including priority skills required by the CETA.

The fourth step is the critical one in the whole training process, as it assesses the quality of both the training delivery mechanism and the outputs resulting from it. The quality assurance process is rigorous and its objectivity and fairness is ensured through the use of registered external or internal skills facilitators, assessors and moderators. These agents apply the quality assurance principles prescribed by SAQA in everything from teaching to validation of training outcomes.

The fifth step, which marks the end of the training cycle for a particular skills programme, focuses on the outcomes of training. As shown in the last two adjacent boxes in the diagram at the bottom, the major purpose of this phase is to validate the training by declaring learner competencies, and guaranteeing the issue of relevant certificates to successful candidates.

Looking at the process map and the explanation given so far in this section, several points can be made about the roll out of skills programmes at Mvela Phanda Construction; and these can be captured in the following manner.

Skills development is systematic in that it follows clear logical steps from start to finish. These logical steps make implementation both easy and straight forward.

Skills development is characterised by continuity because, after the validation of results, the programme may be reviewed and adjusted depending on the situation, and the process starts again, as illustrated by the arrow on the left hand side of the diagram.

Skills programmes are NQF-aligned; this means that they are fully compliant with the requirements of SAQA. Training resources are made available (R2.7 million training budget) despite the financial constraints that most firms are feeling as a result of the severe global recession, which has depressed demand for construction services. The stringent quality management mechanisms ensures that the qualifications that learners get are not only credible but also portable, i.e. they can be used by candidates in other fields when they want to further their studies or start new careers.

Training evaluation is important because it generates information that both trainers and participants need in order to determine training effectiveness and transferability of knowledge and skills to the job. According to Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hartfield (2002), feedback on training reduces anxiety and lets participants know what they must do to improve. Employees taking part in the training and development (T&D) programme want to know how their progress compares to T&D objectives. This principle was applied in the study in order to determine whether or not participants “asked participants for comments” before the planning process.

Breakwell and Millward (1995:12) identify several advantages and/or benefits of training evaluation; these are estimated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints; this promotes quality assurance which makes it evident that accountability is being taken seriously; specifies where one is succeeding; identifies problems and suggest solutions to them; justifies changes already planned; allows changes to be monitored; sets standards for future assessments; refines objectives for the future; improves credibility of basis for cases for extra resources; and heightens staff motivation, if sometimes only temporarily.

Walker (1992:274) stresses the fact that “performance evaluation is important to employees because it answers their basic question: “How am I doing?” since people tend to want feedback.

Feedback gives reassurance that they are contributing and doing the right things. It also brings the awareness of the impact of performance on desired results (e.g. customer satisfaction). More importantly, a measure of the adequacy of performance (quality, quantity, speed) are recognised and enhanced. Workers’ self-worth is promoted and developed because of the recognition of the importance and value of their performance.

Performance evaluation is used to motivate and guide the individual employee towards purposeful personal development of skills and capabilities. To some managers, this is the sole purpose of appraisal and an important tool for managing. The focus may be on development of capabilities for the current assignment or development for future assignments and responsibilities. Where it involves the latter, performance evaluation closely relates to individual development planning, which is future-oriented. A review of past performance is a potent stimulus and guide for employee self-analysis, contributing to self-development planning.

5.4 When to do training evaluation

Commenting on the timing of training evaluations, Harrison (1997:304) points out that there are several possible choices: firstly, if the purpose of evaluation is to find out how valid the learning event was in helping the learners to reach identified standards by its end, then monitoring standards reached before and at the end of the learning event may be sufficient. However, it would be advisable to evaluate at least once again, at a later date, in order to assess how far learning has been retained and its ultimate impact.

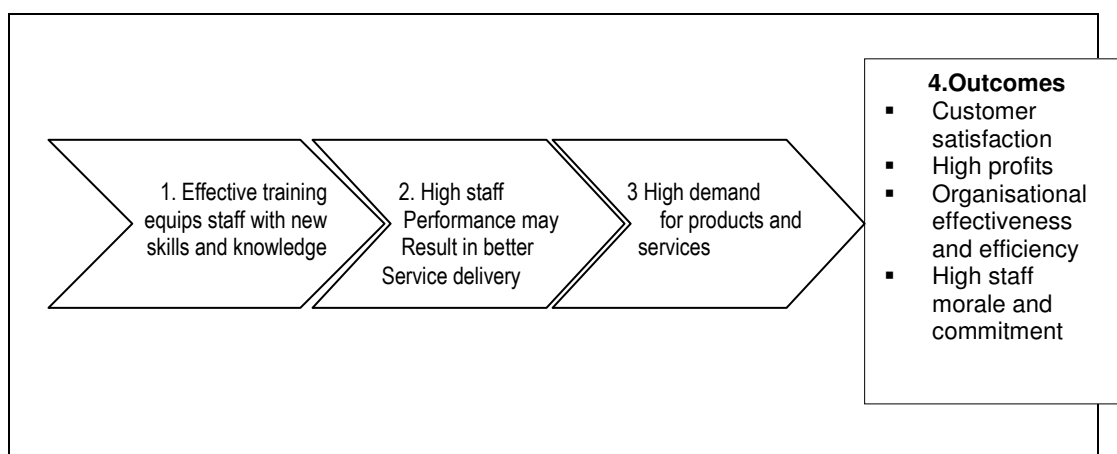
Secondly, if the cost-efficiency of the input is to be evaluated, evaluation using reactions of the learners during and at the end of the event, and pre-

and post-tests of the learning they have acquired in relation to the objectives of the learning event will probably prove sufficient. Thirdly, if the cost-effectiveness of the programme needs to be evaluated in order to decide whether the organisation should invest again in such a programme, it may prove necessary to evaluate by reference to job performance in the short term, and the longer term impact on both job performance and overall organisational trends in, for example, profitability, morale and flexibility.

Unfortunately, as Casio (2003:291) observes, organisations sometimes place too much emphasis on techniques and methods of training and not enough emphasis on first defining what the employee should learn in relation to the desired job behaviours. In addition, fewer than half of all organisations even try to measure the value of training, and fewer still calculate the return in monetary terms.

In summary, the last step mentioned above (monitoring and evaluation) ensures control of training delivery and validation of its outcomes by comparing actual against intended results, and information needed in the planning of future events. Since this stage can be particularly resource-hungry, the main principle is to achieve a sensible balance between the need to check what is happening at various stages of a learning event, while doing what is feasible and cost-efficient (Harrison, 1997:302).

Figure 5.3 Link between training, performance and profitability



Source: Own compilation (2009)

In Figure 5.3 above, there is a clear link between the training, employee performance and organisational productivity. When employees receive training (step 1) their knowledge and skills improve, and this in turn increases their performance on the job. In other words, effective training enables employees to meet their targets. Therefore, high staff performance leads to better service delivery in the organisation (step 2). When the organisation does well in service delivery, the demand for its products increases and this leads to high customer satisfaction, better profits for the organisation, and a highly motivated workforce.

5.5 Monitoring and evaluation

Beardwell and Holden (1997:393) argue that the penultimate stage in the training strategy is the evaluation and monitoring of training. It is one of the most important but often the most neglected or least adequately carried out parts of the training process. It is important to evaluate training in order to assess its effectiveness in producing the learning outcomes specified when the training intervention was planned and to indicate where improvements or changes are required to make training even more effective.

The authors further point out that it is at the planning stage that the basis upon which each category of training is to be evaluated should be determined. At the same time, it is necessary to consider how the information required to evaluate learning events should be obtained and analysed. The following table summarises the techniques used by the organisation in monitoring and evaluating skills development programmes.

Similarly, Truelove (1992:125) views evaluation as the process of obtaining and weighing all the evidence about the effects of training and processes such as identifying needs or objective setting. It is a systematic collection and analysis of information necessary to make effective decisions related to the selection, adoption, design, modification and value of a training programme.

The ultimate purpose of training is to improve the efficiency or the effectiveness of the organisation. Evaluation is concerned with measuring how far training has achieved these goals. At Mvela Phanda, training evaluation is practiced and it involves both on-the-job and off-site monitoring and evaluation activities. The following table shows the techniques that the organisation uses to monitor and evaluate its skills development programmes.

The third level of evaluation in Kirkpatrick's model measures the extent to which learners or participants are able to practise and/or apply acquired knowledge and skills on the job. The underlying assumption here is that participants' satisfaction with training and the knowledge that they have acquired from it are not sufficient to prove that the training was effective and thus beneficial to the organisation. Trainees are expected to learn a skill or body of knowledge that results in a positive change in job behaviour.

This view is confirmed by the findings of the study, which showed that management wanted employees to translate learnt knowledge and skills into tangible results. In practice, this meant meeting their targets, for example, the ability to lay 800 to 1 000 bricks per day, so that the

company would be able to maximise greater profits. Training certificates alone were not enough to justify the investment that the company had made in training. Proof was needed to ensure that what people had learnt was useful for the organisation.

Table 5.3: Monitoring and evaluation of training used by the organisation

| Monitoring / evaluation method | What it means in practice |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Reporting | Compiling quarterly reports and submitting these to the CETA and clients, and using feedback from these stakeholders to improve delivery of skills programmes in the company |
| Quality assurance | Appointing external assessors and moderators to check quality of assessments and training outcomes |
| Observation on the job | Determining the ability of trainees to correctly apply acquired knowledge and skills on the job and provide necessary coaching |
| Benchmarking against NQF | Comparing and contrasting training materials, systems and procedures with stipulated SAQA/NQF policy guidelines to ensure full compliance |

Source: Own compilation (2009)

As Table 5.3 illustrates, the organisation uses four methods to evaluate training effectiveness and efficiency. These include reporting, which is basically the compilation and submission of quarterly reports to the CETA and concerned stakeholders. These data collection and distribution plays an important role in improving where necessary, after the feedback has been received from concerned construction industry players.

Secondly, Mvela Phanda appoints external assessors and moderators who help to check the quality of their training programmes. Quality assurance helps improve the level of the quality of work done by workers and at the same time improves production. The ultimate goal in Mvela Phanda is high turnover on profits, mainly because their customers are always satisfied with the final output.

Mvela Phanda employees are not very keen about the training the company conducts, and as one employee commented: “no benefit, because after that training I am working as a general worker, assisting the qualified bricklayers” (interview, July 25, 2008). Employees are not reasonably given a chance to practise the learnt knowledge from the training programmes.

Mvela Phanda Management is doing very well when it comes to benchmarking against the NQF. They constantly compare and contrast their training materials, systems and procedures with stipulated SAQA/NQF policy guidelines to ensure full compliance with training requirements.

Although the monitoring techniques used by the organisation are reasonable, however, they are not broad enough to cover all aspects of training. Kirkpatrick (in Fisher, Schoenfeldt and Shaw, 1993) identify four levels of training evaluation, and these include learner reaction, learning, behaviour and results. If assessed properly, these variables or factors may provide good feedback regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of a skills development programme. The following tables summarises the four levels of training.

Table 5.4: The four levels of training evaluation

| Levels of training evaluation | Implications |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Level 1: Reaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Did participants like the training?▪ Were participants satisfied with the training? |
| Level 2: Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Did participants learn new concepts and principles?▪ Did participants acquire knowledge and skills? |
| Level 3: Behaviour | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Did previous behaviour change as a result of the training?▪ Were participants able to practice learnt skills? |
| Level 4: Results | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Did organisational performance improve as a result of the training? |

Source: Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model cited in Fisher, Schoenfeldt and Shaw, (1993)

Table 5.4 shows four levels of training evaluation as proposed by Kirkpatrick and these include reaction, learning, behaviour and results. While the first level gives a picture of how learners felt about the training programme, the second level enables training managers to determine learning effectiveness. The third level provides clarity on whether learners are able to practise what they have learnt (new knowledge and skills) back on the job. Buckley and Capple (1995:33) describe the first phase of evaluation as internal validation; which is the process of measuring trainee's performance to see if they have achieved the objectives of the training. Information to make this assessment needs to be obtained in two ways. Firstly, a series of tests, exercises and assessments instruments should be designed and used to examine objectively or to check on the progress of trainees.

Based on Table 5.4 above, it is clear that training evaluation needs to take into account a wide range of issues in order to produce comprehensive and balanced feedback regarding the overall effectiveness of a skills development programme. This contrasts sharply with the findings of the

study regarding the monitoring and evaluation of skills development in the selected organisation (Mvela Phanda).

Research shows that training evaluation is not always done successfully in many organisations. One of the major reasons for this, as Casio (2003:291) correctly observes is that organisations sometimes place too much emphasis on techniques and methods of training and not enough on first defining what the employee should do in relation to the desired job. The findings of the study confirm this statement, as many of the participants complained about the lack of opportunities for practicing acquired knowledge and skills on the job.

Buckley and Capple (1995:51) emphasises the importance of feedback from the skills development process. This feedback, which must be communicated to trainees soon after the training, can be elicited through questions such as whether work-related feedback is provided that really compares results and behaviours with required standards. It is also important for the feedback to be given soon after training and done frequently in order to help workers remember what they did, and correct and practise the required corrected version whilst it is still fresh in their minds.

The feedback should be clear, specific and to the point, able to pinpoint exactly where the problem is and provide clear remedies and required solutions. The feedback should be objective, positive, educational and constructive if it is meant to correct the identified problem.

Hamblin (1974) supports the above view, stating that evaluation is a means to elicit feedback about training. It is "Any attempt to obtain information (feedback) on the effects of a training programme, and to assess the value of the training in the light of that information." Evaluation leads to control, which means deciding whether or not the training was worthwhile (preferably in cost-benefit terms) and what improvements are required to make it even more cost-effective. Armstrong (1999:531) states

that the setting of objectives and the establishment of methods of measuring results are, or should be, an essential part of the planning stage of any training programme.

In contrast to the above table, the findings of the study have revealed that training evaluation in the selected organisation tends to focus more on behaviour change (effective application of learnt knowledge and skills on the job) This narrow approach to training evaluation severely limits the training manager's ability to establish whether trainees liked the training programme and whether it resulted in effective learning. The danger of poorly designed training evaluation interventions is that, they can make the situation difficult for human resources officers and training managers to justify the value that training adds to the overall performance of the organisation. It also creates the impression that all is well in the skills development process; when in fact a lot could be going wrong in the programme.

5.6 Benefits from training

Initially, participants were asked to indicate whether or not certain benefits had accrued to them as a result of attending skills development programmes. Surprisingly, the majority of ordinary employees who participated in the study expressed reservations about the current skills development programmes, and their reasons are explained below.

First, there was a feeling that the skills programmes offered by the organisation are only focusing on the short-term and not on the long-term career needs of employees. The lack of continuity was viewed with scepticism by some participants, which they felt had a negative impact on their careers.

Second, some respondents were of the view that employees who are keen to be trained were not receiving adequate support and guidance from management. Instead, greater emphasis was being placed on profit

maximisation, and according to some respondents, this approach undermined the training.

Third, the overwhelming response among participants who represented the workforce was that the reason why some employees were reluctant to attend skills development workshops was that they did not receive financial rewards after training. The separation of pay from training was seen as having a “de-motivating effect” on staff members.

Fourth, some participants pointed out that the implementation of skills programmes in the organisation is uneven and thus haphazard, because while some employees receive good training on a regular basis, other employees, particularly those doing semi-skilled or unskilled jobs, were not afforded the opportunity to improve their skills through training. The overall feeling was that this selective approach to developing employees had a detrimental effect on the careers of certain members of the workforce, particularly the less skilled group.

Fifth, one of the major issues that emerged from the research was that a large number of participants unanimously agreed that after successful completion of a skills programme, employees should have been promoted to more senior positions, but this did not happen, and people remained in their old jobs regardless of the number of training courses they had completed.

Sixth, it was widely accepted that the reason employees were not benefiting from training was that when they came back from training they were not given the opportunity to test their newly acquired knowledge and skills. “You receive training for the job, but are asked to do a different job afterwards”, one respondent said. These views contrast sharply with the feelings shared by management concerning the role and/or benefits of skills development in the organisation. The following table provides a synopsis of the differing perspectives of management and employees on this subject:

Table 5.5: Management and employees perspectives on skills development

| Management | Employees |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Robust and enthusiastic about training ▪ Strongly believes in linking training and performance ▪ Expect staff to perform well after training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receptive but also sceptical about training ▪ Lack motivation to learn ▪ Want training to be linked with pay ▪ Want to see continuity in training |

Source: Own compilation, 2009

Based on the data in Table 5.5, it is clear that management and employees had different perceptions and expectations about the purpose and outcomes of training/skills development. For management, training would be effective and useful only if it boosted the bottom line profits. In other words, management expected training to improve employee performance, which in turn would lead to higher productivity and profits.

By contrast, employees saw training as a vehicle for improving or developing their careers and increasing their earning potential. Therefore, the lack of incentives in the training programme rendered the whole programme less valuable to them. This situation was worsened by the fact that employees were not satisfied with the fact that training initiatives were of a short term nature and could not be applied back on their jobs.

According to Van Dyk, *et al* (1997:195), behavioural scientists have long stressed the importance of reward systems, the ways and means by which managers allocate tangible and intangible rewards according to employee performance, longevity or other factors. Rothwell and Kazanas (in Van Dyk, *et al* (1997:195) state that reward systems are important because people do what they are rewarded for doing and ignore what they are not rewarded for doing. The authors differentiate between two types of rewards: extrinsic, stemming from actions of other people (examples of extrinsic rewards include salary increases, achievement awards and

promotions), and intrinsic, stemming from work or activity itself (examples of intrinsic rewards include provision of accomplishment, increased self-esteem, satisfaction with a job well done and the satisfaction of seeing the results of one's handiwork).

Marx *et al* (1998:489) concur with the above statement, noting that the advantages of training for individual employees include the employee's improved knowledge, skills and abilities that could improve his or her chances in the labour market; training and development that create a basis for promotion of the employee; training and development help the employee to deal with tension, stress, frustration and conflict; and finally training and development that contributes to the employee's career development and improved job security.

Despite these contrasting views, both parties recognised the importance of skills development in the organisation. It was widely accepted that training could not be overlooked and was a key priorities in the organisation. This explains why both parties were highly concerned about training.

Research shows that before training is implemented and evaluated, a proper training needs analysis has to be done. Training needs analysis is an important factor in deciding the success or failure of a training programme. Goldstein and Ford (2002:53) emphasise the fact that the needs analysis process should involve as many organisational members as possible. According to these authors, the reasoning behind the idea of involving the maximum number of participants is two-fold: First, increased involvement and participation in the process builds support. If organisational members believe that their training was designed with their help and input, they are more likely to lend support for such a programme once it is implemented. Second, it is critical to collect information concerning multiple perspectives. This enables the trainer to gain an accurate picture about the whole situation concerning training needs of the various stakeholders in the organisation.

According to Leatherman (1999:3), “a training needs analysis/assessment identifies specific problems within an organisation by using appropriate methods of gathering information, such as surveys, interviews and observations, determines which of the problems requires a training solution, and then uses the information to design training interventions that solve the original problem”.

5.7 Management commitment and support

Although it was widely accepted that all managers in the organisation were committed to training, at the same time, it was also recognised that management commitment alone was not enough. Other stakeholders were needed to ensure success – CETA, ETDP, staff, big business, and training providers. Respondent A was emphatic about management commitment to training, noting that “every manager’s scorecard contained an element of training as one of the key indicators used to measure their performance in the organisation” (interview, July 25, 2008).

Respondent C stated that managers were eager to see training/skills development succeed in the organisation, but said that this commitment was undermined by negative staff attitudes in some departments, where “people are not willing to take full responsibility for their training”. Respondent B alluded to the fact that a dedicated professional had been appointed to deal specifically with empowerment issues in the organisation, including skills development, which in his view proved the organisation’s commitment to achieving BBBEE goals. This was in contrast with what employees had to say about management in relation to training.

5.8 Progress made in skills development

This question produced mixed responses. For example, while it was agreed that training had helped to produce BEE candidates in the

company, it was equally admitted that problems such as the lack of funds undermined the company's training efforts. It was further pointed out that support is needed from all key role-players including government and business, and "Skills development should not be seen as a sole responsibility for companies only". Respondent A made a similar observation by stating that there is too much pressure on employers to meet demanding skills development schedules, which is impossible, and while the company understood the need to meet priority skills targets, at the same time it was concerned about the amount of time required to drive skills development programmes. Respondent C was concerned about the lack of capacity, saying that it was one of the major hurdles hampering skills development in the organisation.

5.9 Implementation problems

Evidence from data suggests that some of the qualifications or certificates that people receive after training are actually of a poor quality/standard. Consequently, the holders of such certificates are unable to perform well on the job. These findings are corroborated by literature evidence, which shows that “despite mass unemployment and a growing number of people seeking positions, very few of these people are qualified for the available vacancies” (Lunsche, 2009:23).

Table 5.6: Implementation problems

| Nature of problem | Impact on skills development |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Lack of funds | Limits both the scope and time-frames of training activities |
| 2. Limited capacity | Delays roll out of skills programmes and realisation of targets |
| 3. Low staff morale | Reduces training outputs and productivity in the long run |
| 4. Tight training schedules | Affects the quality of training outputs in the long term |
| 5. Poor training outcomes | May destroy the credibility of the training system |
| 6. Confusion about NQF | May compromise quality of skills programmes |
| 7. Unaccredited agencies | May affect planning, delivery and quality of training outcomes |
| 7. Illiteracy | Makes it difficult for the organisation to identify training needs |

Source: Own compilation (2009)

As depicted in Table 5.6 above, the problems retarding skills development in the select organisation are: lack of funds in the organisation, limited capacity, low staff morale, demanding training schedules, confusion about the NQF system, unaccredited training agencies, and illiteracy.

Before analysing these challenges, it may be necessary to consider the valuable point raised by Hague (1973:55) about the challenge associated with training in the real situation:

Training in the real situation causes many more problems than external courses and hypothetical case studies. The problems are such that the organisation cannot pay lip service to the idea; it must be done properly or not at all; this means facing the difficulties and being aware of the fundamental differences between this approach to training and the others.

What is clear from this statement is that, firstly, training or skills development is not a smooth process; problems will surface along the way and these have to be dealt with properly; secondly, that a pragmatic approach is needed to tackle such challenges; and, thirdly, that weighing available training options before deciding which one to use is critical in ensuring the success of training and development in an organisation.

Following from the above, the findings of the study have indicated that the management of the company raised concerns about the high costs of training and the expectation that employees who had undergone training had to perform better on their jobs after completing the skills programme. It was emphasised that training should lead to high performance on the job. These findings are corroborated by the point made by Truelove (1992:36) that skill is practiced effective performance on a particular activity in an optimum time. A person is said to be skilled when he or she performs to the standards required of a job, and not necessarily when he or she has a qualification.

From another perspective, however, the inability of some employees to apply acquired knowledge and skills on the job may be a sign that learning was either insufficient or ineffective during the skills development process. Fisher, Schoenfeldt and Shaw (1993:410) state that, if insufficient learning occurred, the training presentation itself may have been at fault. Information may have been presented unclearly, or inadequate time and

practice may have been allowed for trainees to absorb the material. Alternatively, trainee readiness or motivation may have been deficient so that an otherwise well-designed training experience had no real impact on the trainees. Bouk (2003:2) supports this view by stating that merely encouraging employees to embark on a skills development effort will not guarantee acceptance or participation. Employees need tangible goals and objective tools for facilitating learning.

Lynton and Pareek (1990:8) present some reasons why trainees are not able to effectively apply learnt knowledge and skills on the job. According to these authors, participants returning from training often find their new capabilities are ignored or even resented. They look for support and find instead indifference or opposition. Doubts then assail them about the usefulness of the training. Enthusiasm wanes. Soon they accept their colleagues' advice to "forget it." This statement holds substance if compared against some of the serious concerns raised by employees during the research:

Management does not take us seriously. They do not want to genuinely develop us. They are more interested in production and profits. Whether we go back to the training to finish (the skills programme) is not in their best interest. This is clear because every time we talk to them, they agree, but nothing happens afterwards (interview, 25 July 2008).

Sentiments such as these highlight the need for follow-up after training to ensure that trainees understand the process followed to practice newly acquired knowledge and skills back on their jobs. Based on the systems theory, provision of supportive follow-up services from the original trainers, consultants and other resources in the training system – often for a considerable period – and the collaboration of resources within the working organisation would have been necessary to ensure effective practice of learnt skills (Lynton and Pareek, 1990).

Another way of understanding the reasons for the poor training results experienced by Mvela Phanda is to look at the fundamental principles underpinning learning. Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hartfield (2002) identify six principles that govern the learning process in a training environment: motivation, participation, feedback, organisation, repetition and application. A brief explanation of these learning principles follows.

Motivation

One effective way to motivate trainees is to show them how training and development will help accomplish organisational or personal goals. These goals may include improved job performance and increased opportunities for promotion. Motivation influences the extent to which learners are able to attend training programmes.

Smit and Cronje (1999:354-355) argue that “people are the most complex of all resources. They are also the only resource with personal objectives – they strive for higher status, have preferences and dislikes, come from different backgrounds and have different levels and types of experience, and insist on training and development. Since it is the task of managers to deal with people and have them get on with the job, they must learn more about people in the organisation”. This statement underlines the challenges associated with motivating employees in the workplace. To succeed in getting employees to do their jobs and to attend training programmes, managers need to know the art of staff motivation.

Kay (1984:vii) takes this further and argues that “managers are dependent upon the performance of their people, and so is company success. Good people are a company’s most important asset. People are more important than the plan. A good company is known for the people it keeps. Therefore, by inspiring people to take part in skills programmes, Mvela Phanda managers would be increasing the possibility of high staff performance and productivity in the workplace.

Participation

Active participation in the learning process through conferences and discussion enables trainees to become directly involved in the act of learning. In South Africa, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) makes participation a prerequisite for all learning and development interventions. The need for participation is especially important for adult learners in the workplace, who already have significant experience of the real world. Therefore, by encouraging participative learning, trainers may be able to win the hearts and minds of employees so that they become part of the skills development process.

Feedback

Feedback on courses reduces anxiety and lets participants know what they must do to improve. Employees taking part in a training and development programme want to know how they are doing and how their progress compares to the pre-determined training objectives. Archer (1988:105) concurs with this view when he says that “training is a two-way process of communication between the trainer and the trainee. Effective instruction will take full account of how people learn and what the trainee needs from the trainer in order to make progress”.

Emphasising the importance of supplying people with the relevant information, Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph (1996:34) argue that “people without information cannot act responsibly. People with information are compelled to act responsibly”. From a training perspective, this means that participants or trainees are more likely to respond positively to training programmes if they are constantly given feedback on their performance. Adversely, they may not continue to attend such programmes if they are not informed about their performance in such programmes. Therefore, as Kotter (1998:11) correctly points out, “without credible communication, and

a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops (employees) are never captured”.

Organisation

Training must be presented so that segments of materials build on one another, and gaps, contradictions or ambiguities in the material are avoided. The importance of this principle is that it highlights the need for proper design of both training and learning materials, including teaching methodology. As will be recalled, the results of the study have highlighted the fact that employees were concerned about the company’s high emphasis on short courses. The implication of this statement is that the current organisation or structure of training materials does not provide for life-long learning which, as shown in chapter one, is one of the fundamental principles of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Repetition

A wealth of behavioural research shows that frequent practice during training and development helps the learning process. Practice is important whether the skills being learned are technical (for example, operating a lathe or computer) or behavioural (such as communication or interpersonal skills).

Application

Job training is of no value unless it can be applied at work. This transfer-of-learning problem is particularly troublesome in off-site instruction. The problem is less severe for technical training because the technology used on the job should be identical to that used during training. The findings of the study demonstrated that employees in the organisation are not given enough time to practice new skills and knowledge. This has resulted in a mismatch between theory and practice. The need for practicing skills is also emphasised by Lynton and Pareek (1990:59), who argue that more effective behaviour of

people on the job in the organisation is the primary objective of the training process as a whole.

Nel, Van Dyk, Haasbroek, Schultz, Sono and Werner (2004:426) concur with the above view when they argue that “training must be results-oriented, it must focus on enhancing those specific skills and abilities to perform the job, it must be measurable, and it must make a real contribution to improving both goal achievement and the internal efficiency of an organisation”.

Following from the above, Lussier (2006) argues that learning takes place at the following rates: 10 per cent reading, 20 per cent hearing, 30 per cent seeing, 50 per cent seeing and hearing, 70 per cent talking about it, 80 per cent by doing and using the system, and 95 per cent teaching to others. Based on these ratings, it can be argued that the most effective way of learning is by doing and teaching to others. This has implications for the design and delivery of skills development programmes at Mvela Phanda Construction.

Apart from understanding the learning principles which inform both the teaching and learning processes, it is also important to consider the levels of learning because, as Kirkpatrick (1971:40) correctly points out, each person learns in accordance with her or his own personality, perception, expectation, and readiness. Persons attending a learning experience will go away with different things that they have learnt. These levels are very important when developing skills development programmes for employees, as trainees have unique training needs that affect both their ability to learn and to apply knowledge on the job. The three levels of learning as articulated by Kirkpatrick are as follows:

- **Knowledge level**

This level of learning may be achieved through managing, conditioning, one-way communication, or similar approaches. It should not be confused with application of the knowledge.

- **Skill level**

This level of learning requires adaptation and practice. Being able to convert intentions and knowledge into practical results requires learning in the “action” context and will utilize role-playing, skills practices, videotape feedback, practice, and other action-oriented methods of learning

- **Attitude level**

At this level of learning, we are dealing with perceptions, past experiences, and values. Learning which of these produces changes in attitude is much harder to achieve and will require more sophisticated methods such as confrontation learning, laboratory training, or sensory experience.

The author concludes by saying that these three levels of learning must be considered in order to achieve and maintain performance change as a result of training and development activity.

From the in-depth discussion undertaken above, it is evident that there are many factors that affect training outcomes and the ability of trainees to practice what they have learnt on the job. Therefore, the concern that certain employees at Mvela Phanda could not apply learnt skills when they got back from training may be a risky generalisation, as there are many training dynamics that determine employee competency on the job.

Research shows that poor training results (inability of trainees to transfer acquired knowledge and skills to the job) may be due to the lack of a learning culture in the organisation. According to Armstrong (2006:609), a learning culture is one that promotes learning because it is recognised by top management, line managers and employees generally as an essential organisational process to which they are committed and in which they engage continuously.

Reynolds (in Armstrong 2006:609) describes a learning culture as a ‘growth medium’ that will encourage employees to commit to a range of positive discretionary behaviours, including learning, and which has the following characteristics: empowerment rather than supervision; self-

managed learning rather than instruction; long-term capacity building rather than short-term fixes. It will encourage discretionary learning, which takes place when individuals actively seek to acquire the knowledge and skills that promote organisational objectives.

Creating a learning culture

Reynolds (in Armstrong 2006:609) suggests that learning can be promoted in an organisation by developing a learning culture. This means developing organisational practices that raise commitment amongst employees and give employees a sense of purpose in the workplace, grant employees opportunities to act upon their commitment, and offer practical support to learning. He proposes the following steps:

- Develop and share the vision – belief in a desired and emerging future
- Empower employees – provide ‘supported autonomy’, the freedom for employees to manage their work within certain boundaries (policies and expected behaviours) but with support available as required
- Adopt a facilitative style of management in which responsibility for decision-making is ceded as far as possible to employees
- Provide employees with a supportive learning environment where learning capabilities can be discovered and applied, such as peer networks, supportive policies and systems and protected time for learning.

Van Dyk *et al* (1997:117) argue that training is perceived by enterprises as an investment but also as a cost which must be measured against potential profitability and productivity gains. The fact that training competes for an enterprise’s resources with other investments, including capital investment, means that it needs to offer a greater productivity improvement than alternative uses of those resources. Like any other form of investment, training can only be seen as a net contributor to improved

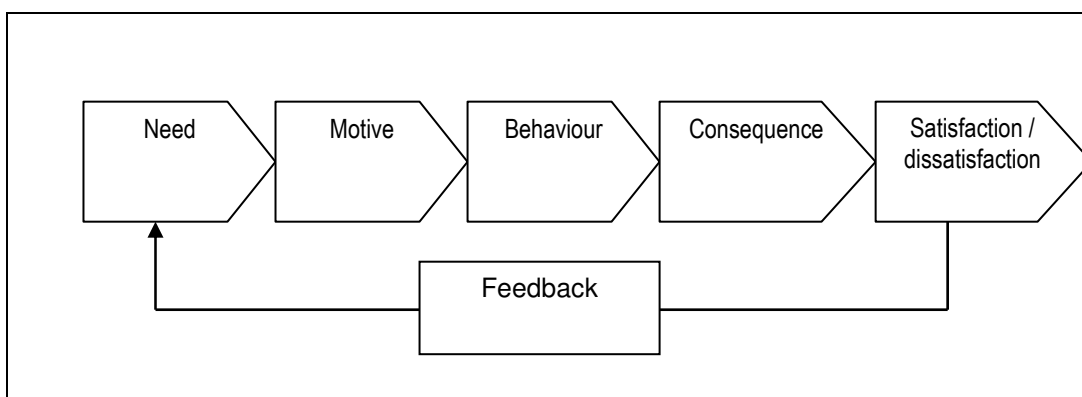
efficiency if it leads to an enhancement in an enterprise's performance which outweighs its costs.

5.10 Employee willingness to participate in skills development

The findings of the research have shown that although they attended skills programmes, employees were not satisfied with the outcomes of training for a number of reasons. Negative attitudes towards training emerged as some staff members felt strongly that management was not fully committed to developing employees in the organisation. The training that the company offered was considered to be inadequate due to its short-term orientation, and lacked job specification, as explained by respondents: "... you get trained but when you come back from training you are put in a different job".

Under these circumstances, employee resentment could be an indication that staff lacks motivation for training. According to Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Vrbra (2007:338), if employees perceive that their best interests are closely linked to the interests of the organisation they work for, they will probably be motivated to achieve the organisation's goals. From the findings of the study, it emerged that employees were concerned about the fact that training was not linked to incentives and career goals, i.e. promotion opportunities. The following diagram illustrates how the motivation process works.

Figure 5.4 Motivation process



Source: Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Vrbra (2007)

As shown in Figure 5.2 above, the motivation consists of five elements or activities: need, motive, behaviour, consequence, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The motivation process starts with recognising the fact that each employee has an unfulfilled need for higher status in the organisation where he/she works, and closely linked to this need is the desire to advance to higher occupational levels in the organisation in future. Next, there is the behaviour need of an employee, which will motivate him/her to engage in specific behaviour – for example he/she may work overtime, and may enrol for a learning programme in a more advanced area. The consequence of his behaviour may be either positive or negative. He or she may be promoted, or may not. The consequence of the behaviour may lead to a state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The employee will be satisfied if he/she receives a promotion and dissatisfied if this opportunity is not extended to him. Lastly, if dissatisfaction is the outcome, the need remains unsatisfied, and the motivation process starts all over again. Satisfaction, on the other hand is short-lived and as soon as it diminishes another need will emerge.

Marx *et al* (1998) state that during the learning process the employee should be encouraged to persevere with the training, especially when the content is difficult and uninteresting. When the employee completes an assignment successfully it is essential that acknowledgement be given.

Arguing in a similar vein, Armstrong (1999:507) points out that “the fundamental aim of training is to help the organisation achieve its purpose by adding value to its key resources – the people it employs. Training means investing in people to enable them to perform better and to empower them to make the best use of their natural abilities. The author further states that effective training can increase the commitment of employees by encouraging them to identify with the mission and objectives of the organisation; and helping to develop a positive culture in the organisation, one, for example, that is oriented towards performance improvement.

This statement underlines the importance of reinforcing employee behaviour before, during and after the training has taken place. The findings of the study have demonstrated that some employees are not happy with the fact that their commitment to training is not recognised or rewarded by the organisation.

Another important consideration in getting employees motivated for a skills development programme is to link training with performance goals and build a strong and reliable feedback mechanisms around it. Brown and Harvey (2006:347) point out that the combination of goal-setting with feedback on individual performance has a positive effect on performance. In contrast, giving feedback on performance without having previously set goals does not lead to improved performance.

Walker (1992:274) stresses the fact that “performance evaluation is important to employees because it answers their basic question: “How am I doing?” Feedback provides:

- Reassurance that they are contributing and doing the right things
- Awareness of the impact of performance on desired results (e.g., customer satisfaction)
- A measure of the adequacy of performance (quality, quantity, speed, etc,)
- Recognition of the importance and value of their performance.

Performance evaluation is used to motivate and guide the individual employee towards purposeful personal development of skills and capabilities. To some managers, this is the sole purpose of appraisal and an important tool for managing. The focus may be on development of capabilities for the current assignment or development for future assignments and responsibilities. Where it involves the latter, performance evaluation closely relates to individual development planning, which is future-oriented. A review of past performance is a potent stimulus and

guide for employee self-analysis, contributing to self-development planning.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides conclusions regarding the main findings of the study in respect of skills development in the Gauteng construction industry, as well as recommendations are aimed at addressing the main problems identified by the study. In addition, an attempt will also be made to identify the need for future research.

6.2 Conclusions

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this research was to examine the implementation of skills development programmes specifically in the Gauteng construction industry. The analysis carried out in the previous chapter has revealed that the major constraints blocking skills development in the case study organisation relate to two issues, namely implementation and evaluation. Using this statement as a point of departure, the author drew the following conclusions concerning the findings of the study.

Evidence suggests that Mvela Phanda practises skills development and that such programmes focus on addressing performance issues, although it does, to some extent, pursue skills development. This is illustrated by affirmation and support for training at all levels of the organisation.

There was a high level of compliance in the organisation under review in respect of skills development. This was evidenced by the existence of comprehensive files containing training goals and strategies.

Despite the time pressures associated with construction work, it was encouraging to note that managers at all levels of the organisation were committed and fully involved in the planning and delivery of training programmes. The appointment of a full-time professional to run the training function is a clear indication of the organisation's commitment to skills development.

Although training is provided to both managers and employees, the planning of such programmes is undermined by several weaknesses, and these include the following: inability to match training needs with job requirements, failure to link training programmes with reward systems, and, finally, the narrow definition of training objectives and outcomes.

Training effectiveness is to some extent also undermined by the high emphasis on profitability. Justifiable as it is, this strong orientation towards profit compromises the organisation's ability to invest in human resource development which is critical if the organisation is to survive the highly competitive and rapidly changing construction industry.

While management showed a great deal of optimism regarding the implementation of skills development programmes, employees, on the other hand, were somewhat sceptical about management's approach to skills development. There were two major reasons for this scepticism. Firstly, some participants felt that after training, they were not given the opportunity to practise what they had learnt from the training. Secondly, training was not accompanied by incentives such as salary increment or promotion. Together, these concerns discouraged and/or demotivated employees from attending skills development programmes.

An interesting trend emerging from the data was the fact that the organisation had adopted a grassroots training model which involved recruiting trainees from informal settlements around the Germiston area where one of the organisation's major construction projects is located. This is consistent with the government's goal of creating jobs and combating

poverty, more especially in the informal economy where most poor people are located.

It was widely accepted that skills development is “a very expensive exercise” and that as a result, the organisation could not afford to finance all training endeavours without assistance from key role-players in the construction industry, such as, for example, government, big business and CETA. The highly congested training schedule was seen as the one of the major factors contributing to the high cost of skills development, namely, sixty learnerships in ten months, fifty skills development programmes ranging from three to six weeks, and three hundred short courses of one to three day duration.

Contrasting views emerged from participants regarding the value of training for the organisation and employees. For example, while management saw training as a means to improve organisational performance and profitability, employees on the other hand felt that skills development was not producing the desired results in terms of career development and upward mobility. For example, one long-serving employee indicated that he had not been trained despite the promises made to him.

Concerning the implementation of skills development programmes, it is clear that a lot still needs to be done in this area. One missing link in the implementation process is that employees do not finish or complete training programmes even if they want to. This runs contrary to the National Qualifications Framework, which requires trainees to obtain full credits for each training completed.

Although training was monitored and evaluated, there were gaps in feedback and alignment of such training with job requirements. This lack of compatibility between theory and practice prevented employees from applying acquired knowledge and skills in real work situations.

In conclusion, it can be argued that, although skills development is being promoted in the Gauteng construction industry, a lot still needs to be done to fast-track both implementation and monitoring processes.

6.3 Recommendations

The research findings in chapter 4, analysis in chapter 5 and conclusions in chapter 6 provide insight into the opportunities and constraints regarding the implementation of the skills development programme at Mvela Phanda Construction. The most critical challenges that emerged from the discussion related to planning, implementation, and evaluation of skills development programmes in the organisation.

To close the gap between planning and implementation, it will be crucial that a thorough training needs analysis process be undertaken prior to executing the skills development programme. The analysis should cover the training needs of both the organisation and staff. A balanced approach will ensure that training addresses the needs of the company and staff.

The confusion around the application of the NQF in skills development may be a clear indication that communication systems are either weak or non-existent at the organisational level. It is imperative that communication strategies be reviewed and strengthened to ensure that all key stakeholders, namely management, staff and trainers have a clear understanding of NQF principles and processes. Apart from strengthening communication processes, it may also be necessary to provide more education and training workshops to increase knowledge of NQF among stakeholders in the organisation.

Low staff morale can be mitigated by firstly providing employees with career planning and counselling opportunities and making employees aware of the long-term value of training for their careers, and secondly, by linking training to performance management and reward systems. Some form of financial and non-financial rewards may be required to make

employees feel that skills development has a tangible value in their lives. This is important for employees who successfully complete all training requirements and acquire all the prescribed credits for each training programme. Motivating employees to attend training should be a joint responsibility of top management, line managers and human resource managers in the organisation.

Scarcity of resources is not an issue that the organisation can tackle on its own. A collaborative approach by government, business, relevant SETAs, employee trade unions, training providers and employees is needed to ensure that everyone benefits from skills development. More importantly, a co-ordinated approach will increase stakeholder buy-in and support. In this way, the organisation, and other companies in the construction industry, may be able to accelerate skills development and close the challenging skills gaps that continue to undermine the performance of the construction industry.

Monitoring and evaluation problems can be addressed by broadening the evaluation framework currently used by the organisation so that it covers all important aspects, for example, learner reaction, learning effectiveness, transferability of knowledge and skills and impact of training on organisational performance.

6.4 Future research

As the study only dealt with the implementation of skills development in a case study organisation, Mvela Phanda Construction, future research is required to examine quality assurance processes in skills development in the workplace, and the monitoring and evaluation of training programmes.

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ANNEXURE A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Section A: Closed Questions

1. Are you familiar with the national skills development strategy and supporting legislation?

2. Does your organisation have a skills development plan in place?

3. Do all managers implement the skills development programmes?

4. Do you have implementation guidelines?

5. Is the skills development programme being monitored regularly?

6. Are employees benefiting from the skills development programme?

7. Are managers committed to the skills development programme?

8. Are you making progress in terms of skills development?

9. Have you encountered any problems in the course of implementing skills development programmes? If so, what are they?

10. Are employees willing to participate in the skills development scheme?

11. Do you receive any assistance or support from the Department of Labour concerning the implementation of skills development in your organisation?

Section B: Unstructured Questions

1. Please explain how your company implements the skills development Programme?

2. What are the goals of your skills development programme?

3. Who is responsible for planning and executing skills development programme?

4. What resources are used to support skills development?

ANNEXURE B: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Project: Mvela Phanda Construction Natalspruit – Joint Venture

Date: 1 August 2008

EMPLOYEE INTERVIEWEES

| No | FULL NAME & SURNAME | AGE | JOB TITLE | SIGNATURE |
|-----------|--------------------------------|------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Phineas Mnambathi | 39 | Bricklayer | |
| 2 | Taelo Rapolile | 34 | Bricklayer | |
| 3 | Happy Xaba | 35 | Material Handler | |
| 4 | Edward Mafika | 50 | General Labourer | |

MANAGEMENT INTERVIEWEES

| No | FULL NAME & SURNAME | JOB TITLE |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Peter Andrew Gerolemou | Managing Director |
| 2 | Gerald Arnold Kilian | Empowerment Co-ordinator- Consultant |
| 3 | M. S. Aziz Joosub | Financial Director |