

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the results of the empirical study were tabled and the findings of the study were discussed in detail. This chapter provides an overview of the study, together with the conclusions drawn and the resulting recommendations. The limitations encountered in conducting the study are described and possible avenues for future research are mentioned. The chapter concludes with a summary of the value of this research study.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In Chapter 1, the problem statement was discussed in order to motivate the importance of this study. From the problem statement it was evident that skills shortages, coupled with high levels of unemployment are well documented in South Africa. According to Naidoo (2003:3), learnerships, which are meant to reduce the skills shortage, are not successfully addressing this problem. However, Freeman (2003:8) feels that business has embraced the concept of workplace learnerships as the way forward.

Based on the problem statement, the objective of the research was to evaluate organisational perspectives towards learnerships in manufacturing, engineering and metal organisations that fall under the MERSETA within the Sedibeng district municipal area. This was followed by a discussion on the paradigms of the study, the procedures for the empirical study and an outline of the study.

Chapter 2 focused on the theoretical objectives of the study. The chapter contains an in depth literature review that focuses on reviewing the existing skills development landscape in South Africa and locating the system of learnerships within this environment.

In the South African context, the lack of an appropriate number of suitably skilled human resources is consistently highlighted as a major obstacle in achieving economic growth targets and global labour competitiveness (Robbins *et al.*, 2003:27). The Department of Labour views effective learnerships as producers of learners who are well trained and qualified to contribute to the economic growth and development of South Africa (Department of Labour, 2005:3).

The National Skills Development Strategy has set the framework for the development and transfer of skills. Learnerships form a critical part of the National Skills Development Strategy and therefore, thorough research was conducted in terms of concept clarification, comparisons to other skills programmes, components of learnerships, benefits, role players, effectiveness, support structures, and the development and availability of learnerships, specifically in the MERSETA, on which this study focuses.

Chapter 3 discussed the research objectives. The empirical objective for this study is described as a study conducted via a survey, designed to elicit perspectives of learnerships within small, medium and large organisations that fall within the MERSETA in the Sedibeng district municipal area. The study sample consisted of 150 organisations (n=150) which was selected by means of purposive sampling. The measuring instrument (questionnaire) is described, including its components, ethical and general considerations, content, pilot study, administration, scoring, analysis, reliability and validity. This chapter concludes with a description of the methods used for statistical analysis of the data gathered.

In Chapter 4, the empirical results were presented in detail with the aid of frequency tables, pie charts and histograms. Given these results, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- Learnerships are widely implemented within the MERSETA organisations in the Sedibeng district municipal area, although there clearly still remains a lack of understanding and familiarity with the system.
- The MERSETA organisations included in this study indicated that their previous attempts to execute learnerships were unsuccessful. According to these organisations, learnerships address organisational needs, impact on organisational goals and are beneficial to employees. In addition, they are of the opinion that learnerships lead to a recognised qualification and that the learnership system achieves what it was intended to achieve; that is, development of skills.
- The MERSETA organisations involved in the study concur that organisational culture must be conducive to learnership implementation and that learnerships increase productivity levels. Furthermore, these organisations indicated that learnerships lead to an increase in industrial relations issues regarding implemented learnerships.
- The MERSETA organisations expressed concern that roles and responsibilities regarding learnerships are not clear and that insufficient external/internal training providers exist. These organisations also indicated that organisations lack experience or know how regarding the implementation of learnerships.

- The responding MERSETA organisations agreed that learnerships are costly to implement and cause administrative burdens.
- The concerns and views of the MERSETA organisations, involved in this research, are reflected in South Africa's present problem regarding scarce skills.
- All of the responding organisations indicated that they have annual contact with the MERSETA and that co-operation between the MERSETA and themselves varied from non-existent to good. Furthermore, the organisations pointed out that the MERSETA could assist with skills development in various areas.
- The responding organisations indicated that the cost of training was viewed as a potential constraint in training and uplifting employees.
- However, management were of the view that the required skills could be obtained through internal on-the-job training, and therefore, there was no need for learnerships.
- Organisations also indicated coinciding factors like time limitations, unavailability of managers to supply training and managers not being prepared to commit time/resources to learnerships as constraints to learnership implementation.
- Overall findings indicate that these local MERSETA organisations do focus on skills development programmes to conquer existing skills shortages, including scarce and critical skills.

- Almost two-thirds of the researched organisations currently implement learnerships, it is evident that these organisations experience several barriers and challenges when taking on learnerships.
- Whilst there were some consistent responses across the various groups and sections of the questionnaire, differences emerged, which have been explored and discussed.

Findings in Chapter 4 illustrated that there is a link between various barriers, constraints and perspectives when implementing learnerships.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AS PER RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

5.3.1 General objective

The study set out to determine organisational perspectives of learnerships within certain MERSETA organisations in the Sedibeng district municipal area. Conclusions in this regard are provided under each research objective.

5.3.2 Research objective 1

The first theoretical objective of this study was to conduct a literature study regarding the origin of learnerships.

During the review of the literature pertaining to this study, it was found that in South Africa the National Skills Development Strategy set the framework for the development and transfer of skills aimed at combating the existing skills shortages. The Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (No. 9 of 1999) created the legislative requirements for the development of skills in South Africa.

One of the objectives of the Skills Development Act is to provide for learnerships, which lead to recognised occupational qualifications as a means of developing the skills of the South African workforce.

Through the Skills Development Act, SETAs were established to assist with learnership functions, such as identifying workplaces for practical experience, supporting the development of learning materials, as well as promoting, registering and facilitating learnerships.

The Skills Development Act furthermore specifies the implementation of learnerships as one of the SETAs' deliverables, and during the literature study it became clear that skills development, of which learnerships form part, are vital to economic growth and stability.

5.3.3 Research objective 2

The second theoretical objective of this study was to carry out a literature review regarding organisational perspectives towards learnerships.

The South African government developed relevant legislation and governing structures to assist with the implementation of learnerships. This was done in order to make a positive contribution to skills development by delivering increased numbers of skilled workers, improving employment prospects, providing opportunities for previously disadvantaged persons and advancing employment equity. In addition, it was done to create self-employment skills, accredited qualifications, incentive benefits, increased productivity and a greater contribution to the economic growth. The literature study revealed that some organisations do buy into the benefits mentioned.

However, some organisations perceive learnerships in a negative light. These organisations indicate several physical, structural, and attitudinal barriers and challenges involved in the implementation of learnerships.

These barriers include the view that learnerships are experienced as a regime of tiresome obligations and government red tape. These learnerships are seen to be costly and administratively burdensome, with a lack of sufficient training providers and progression within the NQF bands. Additional barriers include a mismatch between programmes and suitable learners, an incapacity to absorb large numbers of learners and a lack of financial gain accruing to the organisations involved.

Allegations of fraud and corruption within the SETAs, together with rumours of maladministration and ineffectiveness, served to reflect even more negativity on these learnerships.

5.3.4 Research objective 3

The empirical objective of this study was to evaluate organisational perspectives towards learnerships in manufacturing, engineering and metal organisations that fall under the MERSETA within the Sedibeng district municipal area.

The empirical study, as presented in Chapter 4, discussed in detail all results and findings pertaining to this research objective.

In conclusion, it was determined that the existing conditions and structures within the organisation are not always supportive of the implementation of learnerships within the organisation. For example, organisations feel that there are insufficient internal and external training providers. The lack of know how regarding the implementation of learnerships, coupled with the fact that many managers are not prepared to commit time and/or resources to learnership implementation are also problematic.

Furthermore, organisations perceive certain disadvantages regarding learnerships. For example, learnerships do not necessarily increase

productivity and learnership implementation causes an increase in industrial relations issues. Learnership implementation also involves high costs and administrative burdens. In addition, there is some confusion with relation to the roles and responsibilities involved in learnerships.

Organisations also felt that their previous attempts to execute learnerships were unsuccessful, that the learnership system does not always achieve what it is intended to achieve (skills development) and that the required skills can be obtained through internal on-the-job training.

However, some organisations did perceive certain benefits concerning learnership implementation. These include, for example, that learnerships address organisational needs, impact on organisational goals, lead to a recognised qualification and are beneficial to both employers and employees.

The overall conclusion here is that while learnerships are widely implemented within the MERSETA organisations in the Sedibeng district municipal area, perceptions towards them are, for the most part, negative. A lack of understanding and familiarity with the learnership system is also an issue.

By interpreting and summarising the respondents' perspectives, it emerged that the major impediment to learnership implementation within organisations is that they require an organisational environment conducive to their implementation, extensive internal resources and a willingness to engage in partnerships with external training providers.

It was also expected of the MERSETA to assist with skills development functions. However, some respondents felt that the MERSETA do not have enough staff available in the Sedibeng district municipal area and that those staff members who are available, lack the relevant experience to assist organisations with regard to learnerships.

It has to be acknowledged that the perspectives of this study might not be applicable to all SETAs and/or all organisations in general.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations are made:

- The procedure and requirements for establishing learnerships are unclear and thus attempts to address these difficulties should emanate from the National Skills Authority, within the Department of Labour, in order to assist skills development efforts as required by the Skills Development Act.
- Concrete efforts should be made by the MERSETA to render a better support system in the local Sedibeng district municipal area through the provision of sufficient staff to deliver the required services.
- The MERSETA could also train and educate their existing staff regarding the different skills development and learnership functions, if their knowledge and experience is found to be limited.
- The problem of insufficient internal and external training providers should be addressed by the MERSETA in co-operation with relevant organisations.
- The SETAs should develop a marketing plan to clear up the confusion surrounding the roles and responsibilities of learnerships and in order to motivate more organisations to participate in these learnerships. This might also have an impact on the number of industrial relations issues that arise from learnership implementation.

- The SETAs should contact organisations and determine why previous attempts to execute learnerships were unsuccessful and why certain organisations view the learnership systems as being unable to achieve that what they were intended to achieve (skills development). This should enable the SETAs to adjust their training strategies accordingly.
- The results and findings of this study should be shared with the MERSETA in order to enable them to address the problems encountered by participating organisations, such as the high cost of learnership implementation and the administrative burden, which has a direct influence on the learnership implementation exercise conducted by the Department of Labour.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study has the following limitations:

- The low response rate experienced in this study was a concern. Follow-up e-mails were utilised to encourage responses. These e-mail follow-ups did lead to a higher response rate than that which was initially received. Even so, a higher response rate would potentially have led to more statistically significant results.
- The collected statistics were limited to a certain chamber of the MERSETA, namely metal and engineering. The reason for selecting organisations within this chamber was that they were readily available in the Sedibeng district municipal area.
- This study was undertaken by a first-time researcher, which might also be seen as a limiting factor.

5.6 FUTURE RESEARCH

As the nature of research always gives rise to other questions, further investigation in the following areas is recommended:

- As the research study was limited to the Metal and Engineering chamber of the MERSETA, the other chambers of the MERSETA should be surveyed and their results compared to the findings of this research undertaking.
- As learnerships are a platform for the effective implementation of the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), research should be undertaken to establish which training or learning programmes are mostly used by organisations.
- The impact of the proposed Skills Development Amendment Bill 2008 (RSA, 2008:4-5) on those organisations that have implemented learnerships should also be investigated. This Bill was published by the Minister of Labour on 28 February 2008 and the following new amendments, which may have an impact on the findings of this study, were proposed:

The insertion of the definition of “apprenticeship”, which is described as: “a learnership in respect of a listed trade and which includes a trade-test in respect of that trade”.

The insertion of the definition of “learning programme”, which is described as: “a programme of occupationally directed learning and includes a learnership, an apprenticeship, an internship, a skills programme, a programme of foundational learning and

any other prescribed learning programme which includes a structured work experience component.”

The amendment to Section 10 to read: “b) A SETA must implement its sector skills plan by (i) establishing learning programmes”; as opposed to the previous wording of (i) establishing learnerships.

5.7 VALUE OF THE STUDY

The value of this study is described as follows:

- As no study of this nature has been conducted in Sedibeng district municipal area to date, the findings will add value by assisting local organisations in understanding the concepts relating to learnerships, as well as by assisting them in planning and developing their internal training programmes.
- The Department of Labour and the MERSETA will benefit from the findings of this study, in that these findings will assist them with their future planning for the implementation of learnerships and other training programmes.
- The responses received from the Sedibeng organisations will help the MERSETA identify their internal problems or deficiencies .

5.8 SUMMARY

Discussions in this chapter have indicated the perspectives towards learnerships that emerged from the findings and how these perspectives can

also be linked to the Skills Development Act, the NSDS, the MERSETA, Skills development and training requirements.

While recommendations pertaining to the MERSETA were made in this chapter, it was acknowledged that the perspectives discussed might not be applicable to all SETAs and/or all organisations in general.