

Training and Development – South African Experience

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With the increasing globalization, rising competition and augmenting multi-cultural exposure, training and development among the firms stands as an imperative rather than a choice. South Africa being a developing country is also seen to be catching up with the pace in the light of the various government initiatives. The article briefly scans the various education and training initiatives in the South Africa.

The globalization has been having its impact on various parts of the world. However, the pace at which the countries are globalizing varies in accordance with the several factors that are responsible viz: the demographics, the economics, the infrastructure, the growth rate, the culture etc. South Africa is one of those countries, which woke up to the call of globalization of late and thus, is in the process of transforming. Hence, inevitably, it is a call to the South African companies too, to react towards globalization and catch up with others on the path of development. Peter Drucker prophesized years ago, when the industries were still running with the might of Capital and Labor, that the next society will be a knowledge-based society. He emphasized investing on people (employees)

and nurturing them towards the firm's development. Not different even an iota from what Drucker said, today's society is a knowledge-based society and thus the most precious capital in any organization is the human capital, followed by the monetary capital. With these developments on the human front, the function of training and development of the employees, which was earlier perceived as a formality when an employee joins an organization, has become a necessary touchstone for every organization.

South Africa, being no exception to these emerging developments on HR front, has been adopting the training and development practices with open arms. However, there are a few issues that have been hindering the change, which can be discussed as follows:

- The statistics suggest that over 70% of the South African rural populace is poor.
- Over 25% of the South Africans are plagued by unemployment.
- Out of the employed population, more than 70% of the people are employed in informal sector (unregistered sector employing not more than 5 employees), with extremely low profits. In addition to these South Africa has always been a prey to the severe epidemics and endemics that have always acted as retarding factors in growth process. However, the recent conscious approach towards human resource development has contributed to better education and training facilities.

Need for Emphasis on Training

South African system has a pressing need to bring in the reforms in the education and the training sector to catch up with the developed world. The country report on South Africa by World Bank says that the country's education system is inadequate to meet the individual needs of the learners with its inflexible curricula. In addition to that the learning culture is also in an indeterminate stage among the South Africans. The country is still plagued by the inadequate provision for the early childhood educational development. The reflections of apartheid can still be observed in the education system, which inhibited the required change and development.

Formal education in South Africa is categorized into three levels viz.,

- General Education and Training (GET),
- Further Education and Training (FET) and
- Higher Education (HE).

The reports say that the formal education system in South Africa is paralyzed by a lot of inconsistencies and incoherence. The education and training system also reflects a lack of co-ordination, characterized by poorly articulated programs, weak connections with the industry, which in turn result in the ineffective skill profile of the South African citizens. These facts emphasize the lack of focus on the human resource development in education and training. The observations also suggest emphatically the absence of organizational ethos, culture of learning and self-improvement.

Until early 1990s, the department of education was also paralyzed by the practice of apartheid with clear differences of treatment between whites and blacks. The government had paid more attention towards development of the whites in all respects. According to reports, the services offered to the whites included individual career guidance, interview guidance, career counseling services for people with disabilities, career information through various publications, computer career counseling and information, career adjustment for government officials etc. It was only after 1990s, the government started providing services to all the South Africans—blacks and whites.

Recent Developments

Skills Development Act (SDA)

The South African government of late began responding to the call for human resource development. The department enacted the Skills Development Act in 1998 with an overall aim to improve the education as well as vocational skills of the people of South Africa. The Skills Development Act brought into force the new institutional framework that aimed to determine and implement the work place skills development strategies. The Act ensures that the employees, without exceptions, will be provided with the required training and development that leads to nationally recognized qualifications. The act intends to engender the

culture of learning among the organizations and inculcate learning in the employees with a combination of the practical work and the formal training.

SDA was one of the major breakthroughs in the training and education arena of South Africa. National Skills Authority of the SDA emphasizes on the skill development of the employees with an effective strategy. The functions of the National Skills Authority include advising the Minister on a national skills development policy, a national skills development strategy and facilitating Guidelines on the implementation of the national skills development strategy. The functions also include the allocation of subsidies from the National Skills Fund and monitoring any regulations to be made or amended.

The act broadens the definition of the word employment and defines 'employment' as advising and counseling of workers on various career choices available. Employment service under the act also includes reference of work seekers to employers in case of vacancies and recommend them to the training providers for further enrichment of the employment seekers, to make them more employable. In addition to these, the facilities under the act also include the assistance of employers to the retrenched employees.

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA)

The SDA envisaged the establishment of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) whose main objective is to co-ordinate the training in specific economic sectors, which takes care of the employee training and development in various sectors simultaneously. The functions of SETA, according to the framework of the national skills development strategy, include developing a sector skills plan according to the framework of the national skills development strategy and implement its sector specific skills plan by establishing learnerships and approving workplace skills plans. It also includes allocating grants in the prescribed manner to employers, education and training providers and workers. Monitoring education and training in the sector is also a feature of the strategy.

(Adopted from <http://www.ctflseta.org.za/>)

Promoting learnership and inculcating the culture of learning among the employees is one of the chief motives of the training and education reforms in

South Africa. SETA carries out various responsibilities towards this mission. These functions include identifying workplaces for practical work experience, supporting the development of learning materials and improving the facilitation of learning; and assisting in the conclusion of learnerships agreements.

(Adopted from <http://www.ctflseta.org.za/>)

National Skills Development Strategy

The vision for the National Skills Development Strategy being “Skills For Productive Citizenship for All”, is driven by six guiding principles:

- i) **Life Long Learning:** The first principle emphasizes on inculcating learning as a culture and to engender the practice of learning for the lifetime.
- ii) **Promotion of Equity:** South Africa is now observed to be slowly coming out of the apartheid era. The National Skills Development Strategy thrusts on redressing the past inequalities and providing opportunities for the underprivileged groups, by encouraging collaboration among people from diverse backgrounds.
- iii) **Demand Driven Skills:** The national Skills Development Strategy is more focused on the skills that are in demand and that support the productivity and competitiveness on the global arena. Hence, the NSD strategy ensures that the employees are trained in those skills that will help them in equipping themselves with the contemporary skills that are in demand.
- iv) **Decentralization:** The Skills Development Strategy also promotes the decentralization of the entire skills development program, which will entrust the public and private employers with the responsibility of making the judgments about the skill priorities and identify the effective providers to meet the training needs.
- v) **Collaboration:** The national skills development strategy rests on the tenets of partnerships, cooperation and collaboration among the various social constituencies, which bring the employers and employees together to understand the skill needs better and cater to each other’s requirements in a more effective manner.

- vi) **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** While keeping in mind the training quality and variety, the Skills development strategy claims to pay equal attention to the cost economies of the training programs, to ensure that the training effectiveness and the cost efficiency go together, promising a total training and skill development.

Multiculturalism – A Boon for HRD

While that was the scenario within South Africa, the sources say that South Africa, in order to nurture the human capital at the global pace, should also expose itself to the multicultural environment. Multiculturalism has a crucial role to play towards knowledge management in the organizations and hence the human resource development. Prime (1999) in his research identifies three approaches to management in the South African work environment viz:

- Euro-centric Approach
- Afro-centric Approach
- Synergistic Inspirational Approach.

The HRD Strategy
<p>The key intended elements of the overall South African HRD Strategy (DoE and DoL 2001) are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of early childhood development, both in terms of numbers covered and in terms of what the notion itself means; • Further strengthening of general education, ensuring that quality and quantity of provision are improved; • Building a system of adult basic education and training that is responsive to both social and economic demand; • Increase in participation in both school and college variants of further education and training, and an improvement in quality and relevance of provision; • Transformation of workplace skills development that is both inclusive and high quality; • Progressive increase in participation in higher education and a shifting of enrolments towards areas of scarce skill; • Emphasis on improving expenditure and outcomes from research and development.
<p><i>Source: Globalisation, Education and Training: Insights from the South African Automotive Sector, Simon McGrath, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria1.</i></p>

While the Euro-centric approach indicates a dominant Western style of management that is in line with the western value system, Afro-centric approach reflects home based and Ubuntu based value system. The main features of the Afro-centric approach include humanism, communalism, supportiveness, and solidarity. The third approach i.e., synergistic inspirational approach is a dualistic approach that embraces and integrates the African and the Western management practices. Prime's observations with respect to South African approach to management practices infer that South African approaches to management are predominantly Euro centric, characterized by autocratic, authoritarian, and hierarchical styles of management with an individualistic attitude.

While the current practices in South African organizations reflect a Eurocentricism, the growing need for human resource development and thus a well organized knowledge management indicate a paradigm shift in the management approach. A multicultural approach always brings along an array of advantages including diversity in ideas and engendering innovative thinking. The knowledge managers in the organizations need to act as the change agents and facilitate tapping into such skills and knowledge, which were not previously available in the company, thereby enhancing the creativity and the problem-solving skills of the employees. Such a multicultural approach to knowledge management and skill development would certainly facilitate in responding swiftly and effectively to diverse markets around the world, thereby forging relationships with the latter. Such a culture of inclusivity helps in nurturing the team's skill set and enhancing its performance.

With the developments and changes discussed above well on their way, one might observe that South Africa has started responding to the global developmental changes. The government has been playing a pivotal role in reframing the human resource development strategies by constituting various governing bodies with the huge responsibilities of bringing in a paradigm shift in the cultural, managerial, employee, and other work related practices. However, when compared to the Western companies, the story has just begun in South Africa. The authorities and the organizations must ensure that the action towards the human resource development is in accordance with the strategy to catch up fast with rest of the world.

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