

**A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHALLENGES FACING HUMAN
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL FOR SOUTH AFRICA (HRDCSA),
ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE NEED TO CREATE SUBSTANTIAL
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

As a follow up to our January opinion piece, I believed that staying with youth unemployment was a good idea since it is such a huge issue in our country. It will be my endeavour in this paper to put forward the counter prevailing view concerning issues relating to youth unemployment and the obstacles confronting the south African economy. First, contrary to the view that the economy is constrained by poor level of quality labour, skills and training as routinely outlined in the local news papers, press and the media. Such a claim may not be true, or at least difficult to verify. In fact, if anything, evidence suggests employers, both private and public ought to be far more imaginative and afford the young unemployed opportunities to access work base training and apprenticeships as there is no such thing as a '**perfect job ready employee or candidate**'.

In contrast to the South African experience at home, South African expatriates have earned themselves the enviable reputations overseas (most notably in the UK, Canada, N.Z, Australia, US, and further afield). This is the case, whether they left SA as professionals, skilled crafts men/ students or unskilled labourers. It is testament to their energy and creativeness and drive. It does beg the question 'what happens to that very labour and their energy when resident in the country itself? Why is such energy allowed to be squandered at home?.'

Secondly, I will explore the issue of technology and the new IT training environment that it has fashioned, providing the opportunity for lifelong learning and on the job training that both serves employees as well

as employers. Thirdly, it is my contention the skills shortages/scarcity debate has been at best a distraction, a red herring wasting valuable time and energy. For, not only has the factual evidence around the issues been found to be inaccurate but also inconclusive at best.

The Human Resource Development Council of South Africa's (HRDCSA) resources could better serve helping to, at least ensure that data is standardised, evaluating and assessing the methodologies used and ensuring that this data is used to positively inform public policy and decision making. I also think the HRDCSA could also play a key role in elevating the standards of 'service' as a concept, especially as it has been shown in this paper that the way forward is technical platforms to skill the labour force. Quality service is the competitive advantage.

As stated earlier, South Africans, Zimbabweans and other African expatriates have earned themselves the enviable reputation overseas as diligent, hardworking, industrious, reliable and self motivated employees in a globalized world. It does beg the question what happens to that very energy at home? At home this labour is seen as a burden on the economy, according to regular news reports. Recently the world Bank has reported that remittances from expatriates represent a significant contribution to local economies. The wall street journal, The Wharton school professor, Dr P. Capelli contends that 'reported shortages of skilled workers is a myth and an illusion'. He believes one of the main reason why jobs go unfulfilled is because employers are seeking '**perfect candidates**' ready to perform from day one without any training or

what he describes as ramp-up time. Indeed companies are content to simply poach skills, inflating demand for certain skills in the process. The better option, he suggests, is for employers and the respective HRD practitioners to seek out potential workers with the prerequisite aptitude and qualification (showing they have the discipline to study) attitude who could fill jobs with just a little training. I agree.

Life long learning is now a reality for employees and employers alike. Technology is rapidly changing Careers and employment opportunities alike. Lifelong learning is the only way forward. It is a three way process; 1) An employer who must invest in ongoing training to keep their skills up to date and competitive, 2) The individual employee who must commit to a regime of study and lifelong learning and finally education and training agencies that deliver the skills needed in the work force. It is clear that technology is the driving force behind accelerating the transition to a knowledge based information- intense economy. The heart of this process is education and training, not just between 0- 12 grade at school, or even confined to those who move on to college and tertiary education, but for all employees who seek careers that are rewarding both professionally and financially.

Technology provides the training platform to up-skill the South African labour force. The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande in his green paper to parliament recently outlined an ambitious programme to increase three fold, access to tertiary education. He has identified rolling out community colleges as the means to achieve his aims. It is not such a far fetched idea when one can see the range of IT application tools making such a vision a real possibility. For example, On-line self study, webinars.etc. These platforms have rapidly mushroomed to keep workers skills up to date providing

employers with the necessary instruments to customise and uniquely tailor employee support training skills, best suited to meet their respective needs. We are now living in the information age, where at the touch of a button Google and other social web sites rapidly expanded the venue for social information. It really is where the public now go to access information, communicate, interact and learn. This is true whether we blog, twitter, face book, wiki leaks or podcast. Individuals are actively using these platforms to link with one another, forming huge communities of scale. **The application of this tools for education is clear.**

Finally the issue I would like to explore and hopefully debunk as a distraction in the debate is the subject of skills shortages/scarcity. Dr Hoosen Rasool, the MD of the Management College Of SA(MANCOSA) is reticent about this too, he clearly identifies poor statistics as a consideration in his presentation, delivered to the MerSeta conference 26 of February 2011. He was able to convincingly demonstrate other countries of similar status as South Africa, managed official data far more effectively than SA. For instance, he found that there is no common understanding or reliable measure of what constitutes skills shortage in SA. The misconception is to view the concept of skills shortages/ scarcity interchangeably. Note, skill scarcity measures the value of skills in the labour market, while skills shortages measure excessive demand for skills at prevailing prices. A technical difference, but a significant distinction in the debate. In other words, skills may be scares but there is no shortage as the price meets the demand. He sights as an example the POWA labour market information system. For example, in the scares skills list 2008/2009/2010 it oddly identified the following occupational categories as scarce, namely; receptionists, secretaries and even general clerks. If such skills can be quantified as scarce/short in an economy such as SA,

with the level of unemployed people with such skill, how then is it able to qualify the critical numbers of doctors, engineers, lawyers that the country desperately lack. **No doubt weak information systems mean wrong signals to the labour market.** Consequently a result is poor unreliable data, which then informs policy making decisions. As a result poor data falls prey to powerful interests groups who manipulate information to serve their own agendas.

In Conclusion, It has been my endeavour in this paper to understand how South African labour has been seen as a constraint on the economy, as seen by the high level of sustained unemployment; it has been my effort to argue against this assumption. The true picture becomes clear when it is realised that

much of the data and methodology used to reach certain findings are inadequate and misleading. Consequently, failure to ascertain and access reliable data leaves policy decisions prey to being manipulated by powerful forces whose interests serve a narrow group, not the public at large. This, I pose as a challenge to not just the HRDCSA but also to both the Departments of Education (BE/DHET) that requires resolution as a matter of urgency. In addition, there is a clear role for HRDCSA to champion 'service', as a key national value. I contend technological advances and life long learning affords the opportunity not only to accelerate and update labour market information as well as the requisite 'human capital', and to also provide the 'competitive advantage' to the South African economy needs.

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