

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL

**LEADING WORKPLACE LEARNING: A CASE OF MANGOSUTHU UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY**

By

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requirements for the degree:

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DECLARATION

I hereby confirm that this work has never been submitted for any other degree purposes or to any other university. All references made in this project have been acknowledged according to requirements.

.....

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

Learning organization and organizational learning are concepts that have been explored extensively in the literature. Interestingly, there seems to be a lot that organizations can still learn from the concept of organizational learning. Using the practitioner research methodology, this research project attempted to explore how applicable the theory of learning organization is at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). Practitioner research allows the practitioner to reflect on his or her practice with the intention of improving the practice. As the Skills Development practitioner, I am motivated to improve workplace learning at MUT.

The literature review conducted for this study has revealed that workplace learning has an enormous impact on both the performance and the image of organizations. As the environment in which organizations operate in the 21st century is very turbulent and demands dynamic people to function within the structure, employees need to share knowledge, and learn and re-learn new skills.

To explore the intensity of workplace learning at MUT a survey and focus group was used. The findings revealed that MUT is on a journey of becoming a learning organisation; given all the efforts it has put in place to strengthen workplace learning. Workplace learning is encouraged at MUT.

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has had an enormous impact on the economic growth and development in different countries, which include South Africa. It has brought changes which have given countries an opportunity to compete in the global market. However, countries with inadequate skills find it difficult to survive in this global market. According to Yusoff (2004:2), the "...education and skills of the workforce have become the key competitive weapon for the 21st century". This has ignited the demand for workplace learning and hence developed and developing countries have one thing in common: a concentration on skills development and training as a very important tool of economic development. This focus both directly and indirectly dictates the kind of skills and workplace learning the current workforce needs to possess. As South Africa is participating in the global market, it means that it has to upgrade the skills of its workforce and encourage workplace learning.

Workplace learning is receiving high attention in government, in the private sector, as well as in institutions of higher learning. Many institutions here are working tirelessly towards an espoused purpose, namely the improvement of the skills of the country's workforce. In this regard, the South African government has established Sector Education Training Authorities (SETA) to enforce skills development in the country. The South African Government has also embraced a Human Resources Development Strategy and has invested in special partnerships such as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (AsgiSA) and the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa). The purpose of such initiatives is to address skills deficiency, unemployment, and poverty. It is a fact that South Africa does not only face the challenge of skilling its future workforce, but also of up-skilling the existing workforce, since their skills do not match the requirements of global economic demands. Wagner (2001:2) confirms this by stating: "South Africa is rising to [this] challenge by enacting legislation and creating programs to train its workforce while building a national framework for lifelong learning".

Workplace learning has a powerful tripartite linkage among industry, employer, and individual employee. The industry has a very powerful muscle in workplace learning at large, hence the curriculum of universities and other tertiary learning institutions is indirectly and directly informed by the needs of industry. Workplace learning is both profit and service delivery orientated, and employees are skilled or capacitated in order to maximize their output which will ultimately generate a competitive edge for the organization they serve. The success of lifelong learning and workplace learning lies solely in the hands of both the individual and the organization. Moreover, the kind of workplace learning organizations engage in should be purposeful in order to capture the needs of the specific industry, its employer, and its employees. Ultimately, workplace learning should change the status of the organization to that of a learning organization. In this regard, Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) as a higher education institution has the responsibility to produce students of high quality in technology as well as to develop its staff members.

1.2. Background of Mangosuthu University of Technology

Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) was formerly known as Mangosuthu Technikon. In 2003 its status was changed to that of a University of Technology. This change implied a transformation of its human resource management strategies in order to perform as a university. This transformation had to take place while the academic programme was going on. To be successful, it was expected that the University would develop and implement a change management strategy to support the transition process from a technikon to a university. Change in organizations is normally engulfed by uncertainty, insecurity, and distortion, which result in resistance (Robinson: 2010). On the other hand, change is meant to breed success, prosperity, hope, and learning.

The perspective of workplace learning is vested in interactive planning; this will lead to learning organizations which is a lifelong learning process. MUT is believed to have undergone the first step of change, which is planning.

MUT has three faculties, namely Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Management Sciences. About ten thousand students pursue a variety of diplomas and B.Tech

qualifications at this institution. There are approximately five hundred members of staff which include academic and non-academic staff.

However, since MUT gained its new status as a University of Technology, it has not made any changes to upgrade existing programmes to university standards. The reason may be found in the fact that no academic department on campus has a mandate to offer postgraduate qualifications because many academic staff members are under-qualified (i.e., they do not possess a Masters qualification). A dichotomy therefore exists at this institution. In this context, Jongbloed (2002) argues that higher education institutions have to engage themselves in continuous learning processes to remain relevant. According to Jongbloed (2002:413), "Lifelong learning poses a large number of threats and opportunities for the traditional higher education institutions. Not just program offerings and means of delivery will have to be restructured, but more fundamentally, universities and colleges will have to rethink and reshape their business concept; that is their way of creating value and maintaining their competitive edge over other providers in the education system". In order for MUT to survive as a competitive university of technology, this challenge will need to be a pointer to building a viable workplace learning environment that will support both academics and non-academics to work as team.

1.3 Motivation for the Study

Continuous learning is not only a compliant issue, but a necessity in an organization for reasons of growth, competition, profit, and excellence in service delivery. To fast track the process of learning and enforcement of skills development of the South African workforce, the following act was promulgated and organizations called into existence:

- The Skills Development Act (1998)
- The South African Qualifications Authority (1996)
- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (1995) and
- Skills Development Levies Act (1999).

Subsequently, the SETAs were established in 2000. One of the provisions of the Skills Development Act of 1998 (SA, 1998) is to make workplaces become centres of

learning. For this reason some organizations have been encouraged to become learning organizations. Learning organizations are defined as:

“...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 2007:3).

In this study, *learning organization* refers to a state of organizational culture, and the activity which leads to it is *workplace learning*, which means that both formal and informal learning take place in the organization. Work and learning have become inseparable concepts, and workplaces have increasingly become learning centres which have to meet the demands of today's organizations.

Tinnaburt (2009:1) defines and discusses workplace learning as“...a practical approach to develop employment-relevant skills, for the benefit of individuals and organizations. In addition to being a practical approach, it also has the merit of being, in principle, a collaborative model in which employers and employees can jointly address skills development through a process of social dialogue in relation to the workplace. Ideally, workplace learning links industry, employer, and individual learning in ways which encourage and support lifelong learning. Typically, it also has the benefit of providing improved opportunities for people who have missed out on learning opportunities in the past”.

MUT training and development records reflect that many staff members have attended various training sessions. However, no records show why staff members have been sent for such training, or how the staff and the institution benefited from that training. It is my viewpoint that there are quite a few gaps in how workplace learning has been conducted at MUT. This institution, as one of the 23 higher education institutions in South Africa, has an obligation to produce a workforce that will compete in the global market. Therefore, as a knowledge centre that deals with knowledge workers, it has to put more emphasis on workplace learning. Aldrich (2007) highlights a very important aspect of workplace learning and knowledge management, in that it can take up to three years to gain the knowledge base necessary to be considered an 'old-timer', or experienced worker. The author further states that, “This knowledge includes personal experience of what has worked or failed to work in the past, and knowledge about who

has worked on specific projects, and would thus be likely to know what was needed”, (Aldrich, 2007:130). This has a direct impact on knowledge management as well as performance management. When an employee leaves, institutional memory is lost. The cost of staff turnover in most cases is underestimated in terms of workplace learning.

Jackson (2007:150) claims that it is the responsibility of the organization to transform and be open to change, arguing that the “...learning organization must undergo a shift of mind”. In this regard, this research will reveal what MUT as an institution is doing things right in terms of the shift towards allowing workplace learning to take place. Secondly, the study will look at what the custodians of workplace learning do to support this initiative. Schon and Argyris (1978), Smith (2003) and Senge (1996) highlight that workplace is not a standalone concept, and that workplace learning cannot be separated from learning concepts like adult learning, experiential learning, reflective learning, action learning, continuous learning/lifelong learning, organizational learning, change management, performance management, knowledge management, and institutional memory. The common factor among all these concepts is that they all involve and encapsulate learning of adults, mainly in the workplace. Workplace learning is planned and has a purpose of both self-development and organizational development. Ideally, workplace learning is integrative and systematic, and requires staff, management, teams and concerned stakeholders that are actively involved. Systems thinking is a concept that emphasizes the interrelationship and interdependence in organizations (Jackson, 2007). This author argues that the parts of the system are as important as the system itself. The point being made is that workplace learning may not take place if there are parties who do not want to fully engage themselves in this intervention.

Taking the above arguments into consideration, the study therefore did not focus primarily on MUT as an academic institution, but as an organization that is engaged in workplace learning with the purpose of becoming a learning organization. Generally, staff development and workplace learning in higher institutions have been impartial, concentrating on academic development as the core business. A study by Botha (2009) found that the intention of most staff development units in higher education focuses mainly on instructional development sixty seven percentage, (67%) and professional development, sixty three point three percentages (63.3%). It is mainly

academics who have been receiving attention, whereas not much has been written on the development of non-academics. However, the two sub-systems cannot operate independently. It is with this in mind that this study looked at workplace learning for the entire staff of MUT as an organization. Like many other institutions / organizations, MUT has been and is still training its workforce, but this study tried to establish how MUT was doing it and would probably still be doing it in the future.

1.3.1. MUT Technology Workplace Learning

I am responsible for the Skills Development unit of MUT. The institution has a staff complement of approximately five hundred and fifty. The Skills Development unit falls under the ambit of Human Resources and Development (HR&D). Skills development forms the direct part of workplace learning and HR&D controls it. That is in terms of quantifying it, and reporting about it to MUT's stakeholders like SETAs, in this instance Education Training Development and Practices (ETDPSETA).

The development of employees at MUT is aimed at being purposeful, developmental and strategic. The HR&D strategic objective is: "To recruit, develop and retain quality staff". In this regard, workplace learning, if applied correctly, benefits both the employer and employees. There are quite a number of benefits in skills development and learning, which Erasmus and van Dyk (2003:47) mention as follows:

Benefits for the individual:

1. The individual can make better decisions and solve problems effectively.
2. Motivational variables of recognition, achievement, growth and responsibility are internalized and operationalized.
3. It helps people to handle stress, tension, and conflict.
4. It increases job satisfaction and improves knowledge, communication skills, and attitudes.

Benefits for the organization:

1. It improves the job knowledge and the skills of employees at all levels.
2. It leads to improved profitability and better services.
3. It improves the morale of the workforce.
4. It creates a better corporate image.

5. It improves the relationship between superior and subordinate.
6. It contributes to organizational development.
7. It contributes to keep costs down.
8. It improves labour/management relations.
9. It improves the organizational climate.
10. It helps employees adjust to change.
11. It creates a positive climate for growth and communication.

Currently, workplace learning at MUT appears to be much distorted. A contributing factor is the lack of performance management. It is done very haphazardly and there is no plan on which workplace learning is based. Moreover, it is seemingly done for the purpose of compliance so that the institution may benefit from a mandatory grant from Education and ETDPSETA. It has been noted that MUT management is, to some extent, supportive of workplace learning since there is a budget allocation for skills development which is centrally controlled. There is also a Skills Development Committee where all these concerns should be addressed. However, experience has shown that this committee hardly ever meets. As the skills development practitioner, I have found myself having to work without a clearly defined mandate. Progress is thus not monitored. Moreover, there is also a lack of facilities such as a training centre for staff at MUT, to mention the most basic. All venues are allocated for student learning. The lack of a staff development strategy therefore exacerbates the challenges that MUT faces in terms of workplace learning. To summarize, the Skills Development Unit faces challenges which the skills practitioner hopes to address in her endeavours to be instrumental in transforming MUT into a workplace learning institution of repute.

1.4 The aims of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine whether the workplace learning that MUT was implementing was assisting the institution in achieving its strategic goals. The study also investigated whether this workplace learning could result in MUT becoming a learning organization.

1.5. OBJECTIVES

- To exam the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed.

- To determine whether workplace learning at MUT was impacting on performance management.
- To determine measures MUT have in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory.

1.6 PROBLEM Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the workplace learning taking place at MUT was responding to the requirement for this institution to function as a university of technology. MUT as a centre of knowledge ought to encourage proactive workplace learning which should be focused, goal orientated, strategically aligned, performance orientated, and which has direct impact on change management.

1.7 Literature Review

The literature review of this research involved an extensive reading exercise which included reading of e-journals, books, and newspaper articles. The review also involved communicating with people and being very observant with regards to what was happening around skills development in general. More clarity on the origin of concepts will be provided. This research study revolves around investigations of learning in the workplace.

The term workplace learning has strong correlations with adult learning, lifelong learning, and organizational learning; hence the beneficiaries of workplace learning are adult people in a certain organizational setting and the kind of learning they are engaged in add to their work experiences (Usher, 1997).

The concepts that were mentioned in the aims and objectives section of the study, namely a relationship between workplace learning and knowledge management, workplace learning and performance management, and lastly learning organization, were comprehensively explored. In essence, the theoretical framework of this study was based on Senge's (1997) concept of the Learning Organization which follows principles of systems thinking. The study per se would not delve into systems thinking; however, the influence does exist.

The demands of transforming workplaces into learning organizations have raised the expectations for high performing organizations. These have also resulted in another

responsibility, namely that of maintaining the equilibrium and sustaining the knowledge that has been created. Weldy (2009:2) proclaims that "...the learning organization is an effort to continuously learn and make changes in order to improve performance; and transfer of training is important so that members of the organization learn, retain, and apply valuable skills and knowledge to improve performance". Organizations' strengths are measured through their performance. Many organizations are using balance score cards these days. Again, Weldy (2009:1) puts more emphasis on learning as he states that "...the importance placed on learning, knowledge management, and a knowledgeable workforce has increased the emphasis on the advantages of operating as a learning organization and improving transfer of training as valuable strategies for facilitating learning at both the micro and macro levels, and for enabling organizations to benefit from all aspects of learning".

1.8. Research Approach

This study was based on action research and mainly practitioner research. McNiff (2000) emphasizes that practitioners have the ability to make a difference in the environment in which they operate. As a skills practitioner and researcher at MUT, I would like to contribute towards making MUT a leading learning workplace organization. I believe that this study can teach me what can be done - and what I can do - to make it the most convenient, constructive workplace learning centre. According to McNiff (2000), "Action research is a form of personal self-evaluation, and also creates contexts for critical conversations in which all participants can learn as equals. Action enquiries begin with an individual's questions: 'How do I improve my work?' and 'How do we improve our work?'" . In this way action research helps practitioners constantly improve their practices. These questions inspired me to undertake this study as I would like to see Skills Unit improving and growing.

Fox, Martin and Green (2007) state that the purpose of action research is not for new knowledge generation, but rather for bringing change and solving problems whilst learning from the process. Action research is similar to practitioner research. Robin (2002) as cited by Hardman and Averweg (2011:374), describes a practitioner researcher as "...someone who holds down a job in some particular area and is, at the same time, involved in carrying out systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job". As the skills development practitioner at MUT, I understand the challenges that

the department faces. I would like to improve workplace learning as the responsibility for generating this process is vested in my office.

This research will be focusing on workplace learning with the intention of casting more light on how important workplaces are in the development of an organization, how individuals in the organization learn through work, and effectiveness of workplace learning at MUT. At the same time, attention will be drawn to concepts like learning organization and community of practices (Wenger, 2007b), which are believed to make workplace learning effective.

To explore further; in this study an interpretative approach is employed, which is believed to be common with qualitative researchers (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). In interpretative research a researcher plays a very influencing role; in how research unfolds, although this has to be very limited as it may result in biasness. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008:31); "All research is interpretative; it is guided by the researchers' set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied". As the Skills Development Practitioner through professional training and experience gained over years; I believe workplace learning contributes largely in the competitiveness of the organisation. That has influenced the decision of choosing workplace learning as my research topic. Therefore; using the interpretative approach assist in understanding that qualitative research is very integrative. Thiart (2001:22) state that; "This process (interpretative approach) must take account of actors' intention motivation, expectations, motives and beliefs –which all relate more to practice than to facts". Such proclamation convinced me that the interpretative paradigm is appropriate for this research, since my intention is to involve and engage respondents through a survey, observation and focus group in an attempt to obtain their understanding of workplace learning.

Organisations have complexity reality going on, and to understand such things one needs to look at any organization as a system (Ackoff, 1997) as cited by Jackson, (2007). Senge's (1990) in Jackson (2007) systems thinking theoretical framework and his systems thinking as a discipline of learning organization were pivotal in this study, as systems thinking highlights the interdependence, integration, and interconnection in the social environment. It deals with complex real world problems set in social systems. MUT is a social system, and according to Jackson (2007), for social systems

to be effective and successful in their activities they need to actively engage their stakeholders. A social system has three distinctive purposes, namely:

- It is a purposeful system and has its own goals, objectives, and ideals that should be taken into account, such as producing students of high technological expertise;
- It contains, as parts, other purposeful system individuals whose aspirations need to be met, such as servicing its members by means of staff development.
- It exists as part of wider, purposeful systems whose interests also should be served. For example, MUT is accountable to the South African Higher Education Ministry (Jackson, 2007:234).

The above objectives of a system can only be successful if the entity actively involves its stakeholders right from the onset, i.e., in the planning process. Ackoff (1997) in Jackson, (2007:235) puts a lot of emphasis on interactive planning:

- The process of planning is more important than the actual plan produced.
- Through involvement in the planning process, stakeholders come to understand the organization and the role they can play in it.

The main concept on which this study was based was that of a learning organization as expounded by Senge (1990). Senge is one of the prominent system thinkers, and his work is classified by Jackson (2007) under the interpretative paradigm. Senge (1990) believes that if an organization wants to become a learning organization, it will need to adopt the five principles of learning organization, i.e., personal mastery, systems thinking, team learning, building shared vision, and mental models. These concepts will be dealt with in more detail in the literature review. The interactive approach was only considered in terms of learning organization; i.e., how MUT plans its workplace learning.

1.9. Research design and Methodology

Research design and methodology are very important aspects in research since they give research shape, direction, and authenticity. Through research design, the main principles of research are determined; these are validity and reliability. The importance of research design is emphasized by Grinnell (1993:94) where he states that

“...research design is a blueprint or detailed plan for how a research study will be conducted”. As was mentioned under the aims and objectives of this research study, the intention of the researcher was to see an improvement of workplace learning at MUT to the extent that this institution becomes a learning organization in the future. Therefore, to gauge where MUT was in terms of workplace learning and how that could be improved, required a qualitative research methodology. According to Reichardt and Cook (1979, as cited by Ghauri and Gronhaug, 1995), the qualitative method is perfect for its openness and investigative character.

Marshall and Martin (1996:522) further stress that “...qualitative studies aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex psycho-social issues and are most useful for answering humanistic ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions”. The epistemological approach that this research study was based on, allowed the utilization of a qualitative approach. Ghauri and Grønhaug (1995:87) also confirm that qualitative methodology is best for action research because of “...its richness in details and unimpeachable validity”. It was for this reason that the respondents that were engaged in the research process were from diverse levels in the organization.

This study was conducted at MUT in Umlazi Township, Durban. The main respondents and participants were MUT staff members (learners), ranging line managers, and MUT consultants.

1.10. Methods of Data Collection

As was mentioned above, the qualitative method was the method of choice for the study; this means that I as the researcher engaged in face-to-face interactions with my subjects. I also used questionnaires to reach them, which is a process that falls under primary data collection. A secondary data collection process was used when collecting data from published and unpublished documents, workplace magazines, journals, articles from the internet and newspapers, and any other relevant important articles that were used for this study.

I am a skills development practitioner at MUT; my position is at middle management level. At the time of the study, my designation placed me in an advantaged position in terms of this research as I could access employees (learners), service providers, and employers (management). Any relevant information was at my disposal as long as it

was not in contravention of the institution's research ethics. It was not challenging to conduct interviews and distribute questionnaires as I work at the research site.

1.10.1. Observation

Observation forms part of qualitative research methods. It is highly relevant in practitioner research because it gives a practitioner an opportunity to purposefully observe people's behaviour, listen attentively, and engage with people meaningfully. Ghauri and Grønhaug (1995:90) put forward the following advantages for using observation:

- "We can interpret and understand the observed behaviour, attitude and situation more accurately and capture the dynamics of social behaviour in a way that is not possible through questionnaires and interviews.
- We can collect first hand information in a natural setting".

Observation, unlike interviews, provides authentic data, as in interviews respondents are very conscious of their responses.

1.10.2. Focus group

Focus groups are also known as discussion groups. Such groups are used in qualitative research. I found focus groups appropriate for this study as the approach supported and strengthened the survey that was conducted. In a focus group one has access to different people at the same time, which allows the practitioner to hear different opinions. It is not expensive to conduct focus groups; however, that is not the sole reason for using focus groups. Focus groups yield very rich data and allow in-depth discussions since the participants are not put on the spot by being required to respond to every question being posed, as is the practice when conducting interviews with individuals (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 1995).

1.10.3. Survey

A questionnaire was generated and sent to respondents using Blackboard software. According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (1995:93), "...the survey is an effective tool to obtain opinions, attitudes and descriptions, as well as for getting cause and effect relationships". In most cases surveys are used in quantitative research; however, in

this case it was used in qualitative research which means that it was supported by focus group and observation data.

1.11. Data Analysis and interpretation

The data is analysed qualitatively even the survey, tables reflecting the results are drawn and analysed. A comparison within the questions and in objectives of the study is made. The focus group results are triangulated with the survey results with the purpose of establishing facts about workplace at MUT.

1.12. Delimitation of Study

The study was limited to the learning activities taking place at MUT in terms of skills development; i.e., skills programs, formal qualifications, short courses, and monitoring and evaluation. Academic activities such as student-lecturer activities did not form part of this study. The availability and willingness of respondents were the only foreseeable obstacles. However, these were overcome by administrators calling and emailing potential participants.

1.13. Dissertation Structure

1.13.1. Chapter One

Chapter one is the introduction which presents the overview and the intention of the research. Chapter one also gives the background of workplace learning, and outlines the support and priority the government has shown towards workplace learning.

1.13.2 .Chapter Two

The focus in Chapter two is on the theoretical framework. This chapter presents an overview of the existing knowledge regarding skills development.

1.13.3. Chapter Three

This chapter presents a reflection on the literature whilst creating a link with the research methodology employed in the study.

1.13.4. Chapter Four

The research methodology and the process of data collection are explained in this chapter.

1.13.5. Chapter Five

The analysis of the data and the interpretations are presented in this chapter.

1.13.6. Chapter Six

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter illustrates the importance and relevance of concepts and theories of learning within the scope of workplace learning. These concepts include change management, as well as performance and knowledge management. To contextualize the concepts, the metaphor of a soccer game can be used. In football, there is a team; there are players, technical management, administrative and support staff, and other stakeholders like fans and sponsors. The success of any football team is dependent on and measured by the number of games played and won, the capability of the coach, and the solidarity in the team. Players and coaches are very expensive and are paid exorbitant amounts, therefore they are expected to perform and produce results of high quality. Players cost money and it is their job to bring victory and money to the club. Coaches are hired to increase the performance of the team and to introduce good and relevant change in the club.

MUT structure resembles a football club structure and workplace learning is a game. Like all other games where good performance is essential, not winning a game does not necessarily mean a game was not enjoyed or important. Flaws of the lost game become the ammunition of the next game. According to Wenger (2007a), failing to learn or achieve what is expected within a given time usually involves learning something else instead. Time and again a team changes its strategy with the purpose of maximizing its performance; therefore there is a strong correlation between workplace learning, structure, and performance. During this early stage of the study, it is appropriate to understand what is meant by learning in the first place, before going into the details of workplace learning.

2.2 DEFINITION OF LEARNING

Learning is a very old phenomenon in which mainly mentally fit human beings engage on a daily basis. Ranson (1996) define learning as a continuous process of discovering new things about ourselves and the world around us. The processes of learning result in some form of change; this is changing existing knowledge,

behaviour, improved skills, values, and attitude because of the newly acquired knowledge. Billet (2010), as cited by van Woerkom and Poell, (2010:2), provides a technical meaning of learning where he states that learning is "...a process through which individuals deploy how and change ways of knowing, or cognitive experience, through participating in activities and interactions". Billet argues that learning comes in different forms but that, most importantly, it is self-regulatory. According to Margaryan et al (2009), learning is situational, whereas Achtenhagen et al (2003) in Pettigrew et al (2003) describes it as not restricted by space and time. It is about accumulation of knowledge in different forms for future use; however, it requires one to be psychologically, socially, and emotionally ready to learn.

The definitions above explicitly demonstrate that learning aims at incremental and continuous transformation of its beneficiaries and their environment directly and indirectly; therefore, as human beings, we are bound to a life-long learning process. Learning comes in different forms about which many authors of emancipation and renaissance have written, and there are many theories of learning that have surfaced recently.

2.3 Types of learning and theories of learning

Various kinds of learning or theories of learning exist, but for the purpose of this study the focus falls on kinds of learning that mostly adults, or rather people in the workplace, are likely to engage in. Many theorists and educational writers have collectively and respectively shown interest in workplace/adult learning, such as Smith (2003), Ransol et al. (2003), Starkey (1996), Prayer (1993), Brockbank and McGill (2004), Wenger and Schon and Argyris (1978). The following types of learning are mostly applicable to adults; hence their focus is on workplace learning:

- **Propositional learning:** This is learning about things in our environment or knowledge about what we know. The environment, community and level of education have a great impact on how we accumulate our knowledge (Ransol et al., 2003). Human beings can learn from what they are exposed to.
- **Strategic learning:** It is of utmost importance that everybody in the organization understands the strategy of the organization. Strategic learning is concerned with the understanding of the business of the organization (Chawla and Renesch,1995) and knowing where an employee fits in.

- **Transformational learning:** Workplace learning is about bringing change and improving performance. Transformational learning, according to Morris (1995), as cited by Chawla and Renesch, (1995:340) is about how to bring about significant and needed change in individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole.
- **Systemic learning:** We live in a world of interrelationships where knowing and understanding the systems in the organization are essential. Morris (1995), as cited by Chawla and Renesch, (1995:340) looks at strategic learning as "...understanding the basic business systems and process of the organization, how they are developed and implemented, and how they can be improved".
- **Dialogic learning:** It is the type of learning where sustaining knowledge is achieved by sharing it with others. Through dialogues like in meetings, teams, conferences, and communities of practices, people share knowledge. People learn about things and how much they know, which helps them to understand their circumstances better. The purpose of it is not to compete and show off how much we know, but rather to learn from each other. According to Senge (1996), through dialogic learning the principles of learning organization emerge, such as shared vision and mental models.
- **Self-reflective learning:** This type of learning promotes understanding of self among people. It is very transformational and requires introspection which may lead to change of behaviour and identity. Personal mastery (Senge, 1996) is also informed by the principles of self-reflective learning, which is learning to understand yourself as an individual, determining your weaknesses and strengthens so as to understand others, and working with them to achieve a common goal. This is also called self-recreation.
- **Single-loop learning:** According to Argyris and Schon (1978) and Argyris (1999), this type of learning is defined as the one that enables people to take corrective measures for errors they have detected; it therefore forms an integral part of individual learning. Tosey (2010:65) state that "...single loop learning is concerned to improve the methods by which one pursues a goal". Single-loop is more informal, unstructured, and unintended learning, yet it is very powerful as it happens when the person is relaxed.

- **Double-loop learning:** According to Tosey et al. (2010:65) "...double-loop learning involves questioning the goals or values being pursued through action". Argyris and Schon (1978) and Argyris (1999) argue that double-loop learning is achieved through organizational inquiry by setting new priorities and weighing of norms, or by restructuring the norms themselves together with associated strategies and assumptions. Double-loop learning occurs when people are willing to change their theory-in-use (Argyris and Schon, 1978), their world views (Checkland, 1999) and their mental models (Senge, 1990).
- **Action learning:** It is learning that encourages the autonomy and creativity which adult learners require for learning. This is empowering and discretionary. Brockbank and McGill (2004:20) describe action learning as "...learning noted for its development of the individual with greater autonomy and independence. Action learning works primarily by individual set members bringing their issues to set and working towards some form of resolution and potential action". Action learning encourages the involvement of both the physical being and the cognitive being because human knowledge may not be divorced from practices. Garrick (1998:22) supports this by stating that "...whoever wants to know a thing has no way except by coming into contact with it; that is, by living (practising) in its environment".
- **Reflective learning:** Reflective learning is about 'reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action'. Schon (1983) is very articulate about reflective learning. He argues that 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' are how practitioners learn. In the workplace, employees have been transformed into practitioners and specialists. As workers perform their respective duties, they encounter challenges and start to apply their specialized knowledge which at a particular instance might not be the solution. That requires one to analyze, search, and see things differently. Walker (1993), as cited by Garrick, (1998:24) argue that "...reflection consists of those processes in which learners engage to recapture, notice, and re-evaluate their experience, to work with experience to turn it into learning. Through entering into a dialogue with our experience, we can turn experiential knowledge, which may not be readily accessible to us, into propositional knowledge which can be shared

and interrogated". Looking at both these definitions, it is clear that reflective learning and action learning result in double-loop learning. Both the former are about changing the status quo, promoting interactive planning for the effective next action, sharing of information, and team work. MUT as an institute of higher learning mainly employs people who possess high qualifications. The reflective learning process therefore attempts to form a link between formal education and workplace learning. Qualifications and informal training / workplace learning are not self-sufficient, but are complementary processes.

In this study of workplace learning, learning is defined as a social process, based on interacting with others and the environment. In such an environment the willingness of all to share their knowledge is essential and the beneficiaries of learning need to synthesize interpret, process, and store the knowledge until it is required. It can be concluded that if knowledge is not shared, it will be obsolete; growth will be limited in as far as knowledge is concerned.

The kinds of learning discussed above are connected or intertwined, and interdependent. This means learning should be regarded as an integrative process. For instance, one may not concentrate on one kind of learning and ignore the other forms. Moreover, the learning theories discussed clearly show that learning is not necessarily socialization because learners are actively involved in their learning; they are conscious of what is taking place as learning is a cognitive process. Fenwick (2010), as cited by van Woerkom and Poell, (2010) argues that learning is systemic based, which means that human learning is enmeshed in systemic webs. Therefore needs to be interaction among non-humans and humans. Finally, human knowledge gets completed through practices.

The generic kinds of learning that have been discussed form the firm foundation of workplace learning, in which all the listed learning theories are integrated. Flowing from the types of learning, an investigation into workplace learning formed the core focus of this study.

2.4 Workplace learning

According to Gary et al (2002) and Smith (2003), workplace learning is the set of knowledge (knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory) within the organization that intentionally and unintentionally influences positive organizational change". Billet (2008:44) concurs by stating that "...workplaces have become sites of authentic practices to see how learning arose through participation in work activities". Hughes (2010) considers workplace learning as a continuous, active and participatory activity where an individual is physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially involved. Workplace learning is an organizational phenomenon which has great potential for influencing organizational performance, intelligence, productivity, competitive advantage, change management, and exploitation of knowledge and technology.

Workplace learning is an investment and should therefore be integrated in the organizational strategy. It is through workplace learning that an organization can find its feet in the global market. Moreover, learning in the workplace has the practical and user friendly advantage of integrating learning and strategy within the organization. MUT has incorporated workplace learning in its strategy and one strategic objective is that "...the focus will be on the implementation of an integrated people development system to ensure the availability of skills when needed, and to build employee competency and commitment to lifelong learning" (MUT Strategy, 2009). In an attempt to make workplace learning formal and to enable engagement in integrative planning with employees, MUT established a Skills Development Committee as prescribed by the Skills Development Act (1998) regulation. Through a workplace learning process, employer and employee engage in dialogue and collaborative planning in as far as skills development and aligning it to the strategic objective of the organization are concerned. Workplace learning is therefore an integrative process that requires the effort of the employer, employee, and the government for it to be successful.

The South African Government is also in full support of workplace learning, to the extent that it promulgated legislation such as the Skills Development Act of 1998, the Skills Development Levy Act of 1999, the South African Qualifications Act, No 58 of 1995 and the National Qualification Framework, which support and encourage

employers / organizations to open their premises to lifelong learning. The main purpose of the Skills Development Act of 1998 is to:

- (a) develop the skills of the South African workforce in order to:
 - i. improve the quality of life of workers, their prospects of work and labour mobility;
 - ii. improve productivity in the workplace and the competitiveness of employers;
 - iii. promote self-employment; and
 - iv. improve the delivery of social services.
- (b) increase the levels of investment in education and training in the labour market and to improve the return on that investment;
- (c) encourage employers to
 - i. use the workplace as an active learning environment;
 - ii. provide employees with the opportunities to acquire new skills;
 - iii. provide opportunities for new entrants to the labour market to gain work experience; and
 - iv. to employ persons who find it difficult to be employed.
- (d) encourage workers to participate in learnership and other training programmes;
- (e) improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education;
- (f) ensure the quality of education and training in and for the workplace.

Organizations are required to comply with the SDA, which might pose the danger of compromising quality of learning if it is implemented for the purpose of compliance, and not as a need. For workplace learning to be effective and efficient, it has to be part of the organizational strategy, where the organization would have done SWOT analyses (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and would therefore

recognize the necessity to commit to workplace learning. It would be interesting to know how prepared most organizations are to heed the call to turn their premises into workplace learning environments, as some employers still believe in using retired employees, labour brokers, or consultants to steer the process. Some questions that may be posed are whether the government would reimburse complying organizations in the form of a mandatory grant, or whether there is any other kind of support offered to organizations that establish themselves as viable workplace learning centres.

Should the concerns raised above not be addressed, it could have an adverse impact on the success and credibility of workplace learning. This is supported by the observation made by Billet (2008:4) on workplace learning in higher learning institutions as he states that "...workplace learning is often seen as inferior and subordinate to learning processes and outcomes that are provided by educational institutions". This is the same challenge the implementation of policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is facing. RPL is the product of workplace learning and experience earned over time, as well as a result of knowledge sharing. However, institutions of higher learning are still finding it difficult to acknowledge and incorporate it into their curriculum. MUT is still in the process of investigating the whole process of RPL, which is long and tedious. These kinds of challenges have to be addressed before the goals of workplace learning can be achieved successfully.

2.5 Purpose of Workplace learning

The underlying purpose of learning is to develop staff, bring about positive change, share knowledge, open social dialogue that will increase profit margins and improve productivity / service delivery, and develop and redevelop staff in industries and organizations. Through learning skills that are enhanced and opportunities that are created, relevant skills are developed which directly call for the transformation of the environment employees operate in Rainbird. et al (2004: 25) confirm that "...learning continually alters the context in which it occurs", as it exacerbates change. Learning and working cannot be detangled from each other. Billet et al. (2008: 2) suggest that workplace learning should aim for and focus on the following:

- Developing and maintaining occupational competence for all kinds of workers across all kinds of occupational fields and hierarchies.

- Generating the skills required for enterprise-specific needs as well as the economic imperatives of government for having and sustaining competitive economics.

Workplace learning is good and necessary, but who is really benefiting from it? Is it the employees or the employer? Or what is the content of workplace learning? If the two foci bulleted above are analyzed, it is obvious that the purpose of workplace learning is highly capitalistic in nature. Marxists could easily object to the idea of workplace learning since they will see nothing in it for the employees. All they will see is the extension of exploitation of employees as they are supposed to learn and share what they know with the highly paid, for nothing in return. However, in this postmodern age, employees and employers have reached a mutual understanding as they realize that both parties equally need each other. The South African government encourages partnership between employees and employers.

Through workplace learning, an organization is able to mitigate any turbulence it encounters which may be instigated by the following external factors:

- environmental
- economic
- political
- societal
- legal / legislative
- educational
- technological.

It is therefore important to work together towards the same direction in order to overcome or adapt to these challenges. Workplace learning aims at achieving both effectiveness and efficiency that are directly embedded in performance, knowledge management, and change management. Workplace learning ultimately alters individuals and environment and improves performance. MUT is in pursuit of excellence as is verbalized in its mission statement. This goal is not achievable overnight; it comes with dedication, creating positive change, and good performance.

2.6 Change Management

South Africa has experienced tremendous changes and transformations since 1994 which have impacted on external and internal factors (Ivancevich, 2009). Organizations are in a situation where it is impossible to avoid change. Erasmus et al (2010) argue that the transformation process has further impacted on the demographics of the workforce of organizations in terms of employment equity programmes, and black economic empowerment. Senge et al (1999) proclaim the profundity of change. Since change is pervasive and persistent, and as its effective management is a permanent condition of successful organizations, it has to be managed. Change management is reliant on workplace learning. Erasmus et al (2010:234) state that; "...training and education is important since it requires people who are open minded, pro-active, and progressive thinkers". In change management the following aspects are important:

- Transformation of environment: This involves changes in values, attitudes, behaviour, norms, and attempts to overcome resistance.
- Improving services or profit margins.
- Planning: Change management without a plan is doomed to fail. Good planning is collaborative and interactive.

Senge et al (1999:15) argue that "...it is not enough to change strategies, structure and systems, unless the thinking that produced those strategies, structures and systems also changes". The catalytic character and intention of change is to change behaviour and the environment; or rather, the whole system for the benefit of the organization. Automatically, the whole predicament raises an imperative question: How could organizations survive without learning to adapt to the sloppy landscape of globalization? Moreover: What kind of learning do organizations need to consider?

In the period 2000-2003, South African universities and technikons were required to merge to form mega-structures of learning. This meant that technikons had to change to universities of technology. This was a dramatic change since being a 'university' comes with certain requirements and standards, one of them being research. That has put pressure on the running and administration of these newly formed tertiary institutions. MUT has recently been engaged in processes of

developing new strategies which try to address all the challenges encountered in the past years.

Change and learning are both results and processes. Through learning people change and through change, people learn. MUT is undergoing change and going through a learning process. Through the processes of change and transformation, people learn new things. Organizations should exploit this new knowledge to the maximum to improve their performance. Andrioupolis and Dawson (2009:5) argue that "...change is not a standalone process; it involves learning, creativity and innovation. It is also no longer the concern of a few advanced organizations, but is essential to all firms operating in an increasingly competitive business landscape". Workplace learning is supposed to be proactive in nature, but sometimes, due to global turbulence, it is reactive, and done for the purpose of damage control. In this regard, change management and workplace learning are direct results of performance management and knowledge management.

2.7 Performance management

There is a strong similarity between workplace learning and performance; both are outcomes based as well as developmental. This has drawn all the focus onto performance as it leads to corrective measures. Organizations are serious about performance management measurement, as only through good performance can organizations secure their survival and justify their existence. Non-performing organizations usually get liquidated or merged with other organizations. Employees who are incompetent lose their jobs. Higher institutions of learning lose their status and do not get grants from the Department of Education. Organizations who do not perform in terms of workplace learning forfeit their Skills Development Levies, which are mandatory and discretionary grants from the respective SETA. Swanepoel (2001) state that; performance management is a continuous learning process which includes reviewing of performance, reward and development. According to Weldy (2009:58), "...researchers and practitioners have stressed the importance of the learning organization as a strategy to improve performance, and as the only sustainable competitive advantage for organizations responding to an increasingly unpredictable and turbulent business environment". Through performance management, training needs are determined which in turn result in personal

development plans. Such plans have a great influence on planning and structuring workplace learning. MUT has realized that it cannot continue without a performance management system, and it is therefore working on its performance system which, at the time of the study, was still in the consultation or planning stage. Through a performance system, business plans are developed and human resource planning is reviewed, which should directly result in retention and knowledge management strategies.

2.8 Knowledge management

According to Clawson and Conner (2009:194), knowledge management is "...the creation, archiving and sharing of valued information and expertise insight within and across communities of people and organizations with similar interests and needs, the goal of which is to build competitive advantage". Chao and Li-Chung (2009:3) defines knowledge management as "a conscious strategy of getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time, and helping share and put information into action in ways that strive to improve organizational performance". In this regard, recruiting knowledgeable staff into the organization is one of MUT's strategic objectives.

Knowledge comes in different forms but for the purpose of this study emphasis is made on two forms; the first form is tacit knowledge which is intangible; like experience, and the second is explicit knowledge which can be written, or saved in soft or hard records. Klein (2007:42) describes explicit knowledge as "knowledge, being encodable and expressible, is in principle straightforward to share, while tacit knowledge is not". On the other hand McNiff (2000:36) looks at tacit knowledge as; "vast unarticulated as people do not know how much they know". Klein (2007:43) concurs with McNiff(2000) where he states that tacit knowledge is knowledge that ; "underlies all knowledge and all skill, is, by its very nature, hidden and inexpressible". These forms of knowledge are equally important and need to be managed since, if not shared, they become obsolete. Chin (2010), as cited by van Woerkom and Poell, (2010) contends that much of the knowledge in the workplace is tacit and requires explicit articulation for the novice. How do organizations measure something intangible and dynamic? Hughes (2010:1) asks the same question based on his concern regarding the nature of knowledge. "How does one manage something that

has no boundaries?” These questions make it difficult for managers to control and manage unquantifiable factors like knowledge, since knowledge is both tacit and explicit and embedded in people’s brains. In many instances, the number of staff in the organization is not necessarily equivalent to the performance of the organization. There are times when a team plays with ten players in a football game and the opponent with eleven players, but in the end the team with the fewer players may win. This can be explained in many ways, for instance, it may be the structure and the environment that suppress players, or they may have no or a lack of support such as resources / facilities to perform their duties. This explains that in the age of information and knowledge, having a knowledgeable team is no longer an ideal but a necessity. Knowledge is like a cardio muscle or a nerve: when cut off, the heart will definitely stop beating. In the same way, knowledge pumps life into an organization. The English proverb that ‘knowledge is power’ holds true because both the survival and productivity of organizations are entirely dependent on the kind of knowledge it possesses, e.g. knowledge of finances, knowledge of human resources, and knowledge of business. McNiff (2000:41) believes that; “We are what we know and what we say, and we are constantly creating our knowledge of ourselves and others”. Knowledge is given an incredible credit of shaping human identity. It is a fact that employees are employed just for the knowledge and skills they possess. This statement depicts the essence of workplace learning and the role it plays in the development of employees.

Weldy (2009:57) supports the important role that knowledge has gained, and argues that “...the importance placed on learning, knowledge management, and a knowledgeable workforce, has increased emphasis on the advantages of operating as a learning organization and improving transfer of training as valuable strategies for facilitating learning and enabling organizations to benefit from all aspects of learning”. MUT, like all other organizations, has the mammoth task of enhancing organizational performance by explicitly designing and implementing systems, structures, and cultures to improve the creation, sharing, and use of knowledge that is critical for decision making and performance improvement.

2.8.1 Knowledge sharing

In the discussion about knowledge management, it has become clear that one way of sustaining knowledge is by sharing it with others. Through this process of sharing

the expert also gets to refine his knowledge through engagement with the group or individual. Knowledge horizons get to be expanded through sharing and learning from each other, and people need to be encouraged not to be conservative with knowledge, but rather to be tactful. Gurteen (1999:5) suggests the following simple ways of sharing and creating knowledge:

- Soliciting feedback
- Asking questions
- Telling people what you plan to do before doing it
- Asking other people for help
- Asking someone to work with you in some way – however small
- Telling people what you are doing and more importantly, why you are doing it
- Asking people what they think, asking them for advice
- Asking people what they would do differently
- Not just sharing information, but also know-how and know-why.

People earn respect through the knowledge they possess, and the only time people acknowledge that someone knows is when he/she starts sharing what he/she knows. The *Sunday Times* (6 September 2009) quotes Dr Mamphela Ramphele, chairperson of the Technology Innovation Agency, who mentioned a very critical point about underutilization of knowledge and a lack of knowledge sharing in higher education institutions. Dr Ramphele stated: “We [universities] have some of the best brains for addressing problems such as waste removal and harnessing solar power, but we are not using this knowledge”. A convenient environment needs to be created for teams and individuals to share valuable knowledge, this is strongly emphasised by Marshall et al (2009:43) where they state that. “The organisation’s ability to learn is largely determined by the readiness of organisation participants to be open and share knowledge and concerns”.

Senge (1990) emphasizes the vital role played by shared vision and mental models, and argues that through these principles the strategic matters get to be disseminated to everybody in the organization. At MUT the Principal addresses the staff once a year on the progress made and the accolades MUT has received, and he expounds on the challenges, means of overcoming them, and the way forward. During the session staff members are allowed to engage the Principal in a meaningful way by

asking questions. There are also other means of sharing knowledge at MUT such as in all other institutions, and that is through technological means like the Intranet and Internet. Workplace learning has created a platform where people learn from others, and where they learn to share with external people through communities of practices

2.8.2 Communities of practices

Wenger (2007 a: 32) defines communities of practices as “groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”. The ultimate purpose of learning networks and communities of practices is to open an information platform where people freely share their knowledge on different aspects. In most cases, small communities of practices, as Wenger (2007) mentions, are composed of small groups of 5-10 individuals. This allows people to be open and frank. In these groups there is no hierarchy such as managers, but just people treated equally with one purpose in mind, namely that of knowledge sharing.

Clawson and Conner (2004) argue that organizations that are serious about knowledge management will try their best to codify their intellectual capital and share it in a way that allows people to find and make use of it. Argyris and Schon (1978):268) agree with this in terms of the importance of technological development. They (Argyris and Schon 1978:268) further argue that “...an underlying purpose of the Management Information System is to generate valid and usable information that will help organizations to detect and correct errors and to plan future activities”. Communities of practices and learning networks have similar objectives. These are: knowledge management, improving service delivery, increasing profit margins, and supporting the culture and practices of the organization.

Wenger (2007b) highlights an important point about communities of practices in that people need to have a ‘shared domain of interest’ commitment and an appreciation of information gained through these sessions. Wenger (2007:8 b) also highlights some of the activities an ideal community of practices would engage in:

Table 2.1 : Community of practice

Problem solving	“Can we work on this design and brainstorm some ideas? I’m stuck.”
Requests for information	“Where can I find the code to connect to the server?”
Seeking experience	“Has anyone dealt with a customer in this situation?”
Re-using assets	“I have a proposal for a local network I wrote for a client last year. I can send it to you and you can easily tweak it for this new client.”
Coordinate and synergize	“Can we combine our purchase of solvents to achieve bulk discounts?”
Discussing developments	“What do you think of the new CAD system? Does it really help?”
Documentation projects	“We have faced this problem five times now. Let us write it down once and for all.”
Visits	“Can we come and see your after-school program? We need to establish one in our city.”
Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	“Who knows what, and what are we missing? What other groups should we connect with?”

Starkey (1996) commends learning networks for the creation of opportunities for collaboration between individuals and teams, whereby a learning enterprise is created. However, Wenger (2007 a) contends that a website is in itself not a community of practice. Having the same job or the same title does not constitute a community of practices unless members interact and learn together. In big organizations like MUT, it is sometimes not easy to know whether there are communities of practices or not, and how effective these are. It is assumed that all organizations should have communities of practices; however, in most cases it is only the members who are aware of their effectiveness who collaborate, whereas others who are not part of that group can only notice the changes in behaviour and performance of the people involved. Like workplace learning, it becomes difficult to measure how much an individual has learnt from such sessions, as some are not even formal, but fluid structures. However, although the impact of

communities of practices may not be physically measured, they are recommended for boosting self-esteem and self-worth. Starkey (1996) suggests that employees in particular should be encouraged to see themselves as critical providers of organizational knowledge through their enhanced learning capabilities.

Anderson and Anderson (2001: 53) recommend a very useful approach in encouraging learning in the workplace, which is sending employees to attend seminars, workshops, conferences, and meetings. They also suggest giving employees direct access to the marketplace by sending them on benchmarking missions, putting them on teams to study industry trends, or exposing them to competitors' strategies. Their direct advice to managers is to:

1. Employ open book management, thus exposing employees to their business strategies, the reasons for them, and the business model they employ, as well as to the financial performance of their organization.
2. Create an enterprise-wide project integration infrastructure so individual change initiatives continually share status reports, other information, and resources with one another.
3. Deliver continuous mid-process communications about the marketplace and change effort, rather than only sharing information when an answer or solution has been formalized.

Anderson and Anderson (2001) suggest that employees should explore and collaborate with people with different world views to form communities of practices away from the work area with the purpose of coming back refreshed. To employees this sends a message that they are trusted and it thereby motivates them to learn and perform better. Some managers hold on to their position for dear life and only delegate duties that they find uninteresting. Such duties may not have much value, and when an employee has achieved them, there will be no accolades. These duties may imply working behind the scenes during the foundation phase of a project and will take time to be achieved or completed.

Communities of practices in organizations need to be highly considered as they promote access to information, build mental models, and give people the opportunity to learn at their own pace as they talk about what they are passionate about. Wenger

(2007:7) again points to the benefits of having such communities in organizations in as far as organizational strategy is concerned:

- Communities of practices enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need. Recognizing that, and given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this.
- Communities among practitioners create a direct link between learning and performance, because the same people participate in communities of practices and in teams and business units.
- Practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing, as well as the more explicit aspects thereof.
- Communities are not limited by formal structures; they create connections among people across organizational and geographical boundaries.

Earl (2001:220) advises organizations to be very diplomatic when they want to suck knowledge from their employees. He states: "Since tacit knowledge is not easily explicated or articulated, the key is to identify who might be a source of knowledge anywhere in the enterprise through conversation and contact, rather than to access a knowledge base which may not only contain inadequate knowledge, but may also have answers to rather too precise questions". What is being suggested here is exactly what communities of practices are trying to achieve: getting information which would not have been known if such a platform had not been opened.

There are many positive things about communities of practices. However; there are challenges as well. For example, a skills development unit has minimum control over these communities of practices. This control referred to is a positive control in terms of administration and reporting. It is difficult to ascertain the following about communities of practices:

- How many communities of practices exist in an organization?
- How many people are involved in them?
- How is their effectiveness assessed?
- How is the content of the discussions assessed?
- How can the organization help them if it is unaware of their existence?
- How is organizational intellectual property protected during these sessions?

Although there are these questionable issues about communities of practices, they are part and parcel of learning organizations' disciplines – this is, team learning, because that is what is being endorsed and encouraged. According to Senge (1990:220), "...team learning involves mastering the practices of dialogue and discussion; the two distinct ways in which teams converse. In dialogue there is free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep 'listening' to one another and suspending of one's own views. In contrast, in discussions, different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at this time".

Both the Skills Development Unit and the Research Directorate of MUT support the sharing of information and knowledge management. This is evident in the budget allocation for staff attending seminars, workshops, and conferences where they often also present papers. Employees are always encouraged to share what they have learnt with the MUT community in their respective faculties or departments. In communities of practices, people learn to share, to learn from others, and to get support. The kind of knowledge shared there, according to Smith (2002), is procedural, propositional and dispositional knowledge. It is the knowledge that, if applied well, is likely to heighten performance.

2.8.3 Human capital

Clawson and Conner (2004) emphasize knowledge management within organizations. Du Toit and Pienaar (2009) highlight human capital, which is not totally divorced from knowledge management. In the latter emphasis is on the innovation and creativity that the workers bring into the organization. Organizations rely on different kinds of knowledge that are all equally important for their survival. Human capital, which can be further categorized as intellectual capital and structural capital, needs to be groomed, nurtured and developed in order to guard against its obsolescence. Du Toit and Pienaar (2009;122), cited Bollen, Vergauwen and Schnieders, (2005) define intellectual capital as "...the collection of intangible resources and their flows, where intangible resources contribute to the value creating process of the company and are under control of the company". Organizations' life is not solely dependent on finances, but also on their culture and norms, relations, attitudes, communication lines, and values. The knowledge, skills, and information

system in the organization form part of intellectual capital. When organizations do their skills audit, they try to check part of their intellectual capital with the intention of developing it and assessing its validity. In order for intellectual capital to prosper, it needs to have human capital, as human beings by nature were given the power to think. This means that organizations are what they are because of the thinking capacity of their people.

The MUT Human Resources unit recruits new employees based on their human capital. In this regard, interviews are mechanisms of checking whether the incumbent has the kind of human capital that will benefit the organization and positively contribute to the intellectual capital of the organization at large. This explains why job interview surveys will have a variety of questions which try to address job knowledge, communication skills (attitude and interrelationship), creativity and innovation, and qualifications. Bontis (1998), as cited by Du Toit and Pienaar, 2009:122), defines human capital as "...a combination of an individual's education, genetic inheritance, experience, and attitudes to life and business". Ahmad et al (2010:2) further emphasize the integrative nature of human capital which includes learning, knowledge sharing, experiments, experiences, capabilities, and enthusiasm, creativity, and core competencies of human resources available to the organization. The formal, informal incidental learning, adaptive and generative knowledge and experience values gained over a period of time form one's human capital. Ahmad et al. (2010: 4) highlight the value and importance of human capital as follows:

- It is one of the critical and unique sources that affect performance.
- It helps in creating new knowledge.
- It is a resource that is difficult for others to imitate.
- It helps in the achievement of competitive advantage for the organization.
- It helps to increase the efficient use of assets, to achieve higher productivity, and to render better service to customers.
- It has a direct impact on the ability of entrepreneurs - owners of new ideas - in securing the capital needed to start new projects.

Human capital is the unwritten curriculum vitae of an individual; it gives details about the experience the person has, as well as the qualifications and other achievements

the person has acquired over a certain period. In order for an organization to constantly benefit from human capital, a work environment and structure conducive to learning needs to be created. An individual himself needs to mix and share information with other people from different walks of life and with people who share a common interest with him (communities of practices). Learning organizations are highly reliant on this kind of knowledge as people are drivers of change, which may not take place on its own. The learning organization concept is tacit and knowledge based, and needs open minded people who are willing to tackle change by its horns for it to be effective.

2.8.4 Institutional memory

Through intellectual capital and human capital, a new version of knowledge is built; this is institutional memory, which includes a history of the organization. According to Wikipedia (2010) description; “Institutional memory is a collective set of facts, concepts, experiences and know-how held by a group of people; it transcends to individuals through the ongoing transmission of memories between members of the group”. Learning organizations produce institutional memory in the sense that the foundation of meaningful learning is past learning and experience. Starkey (1996;318) supports this and states that “...organizational memory depends on institutional mechanisms, for example policies, strategies, and explicit models used to retain knowledge”. Meyer et al (2007) argues that as the institutional memory forms the stronghold of learning organization, it cannot be built overnight as it contains the treasures of the organization. These treasures are highly valued information about the organization for the organization. Information stored in the institutional memory is classic; it can stand the test of time. Not just everybody in the organization can have his/ her name engraved on it, but people who are prepared to be lifelong learners are inquisitive (Meyer et al, 2007), and they share information willingly with others to make a difference in their organization for their organization. Learning that has taken place in the organization, as well as the successful strides that the organization has taken, are recorded in the institutional memory. It therefore becomes the duty of the organizational leadership to develop this memory bank by managing knowledge in the organization and guarding against memory loss. Starkey (1996) emphasizes that knowledge is power and organizations are built through it

whilst on the other hand Morgan (1996) in Stoyko (2009;6) believes that, “A robust organisational memory is one in which knowledge is mirrored in many places throughout the organisation”. Knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, is a concerted group effort.

2.9 Learning organization

The discussion above has made it clear that the ultimate destination of workplace learning is a learning organization. It is a state that the organization achieves through being persistent with workplace learning and staff development. The term learning organization was first coined by Peter Senge in the early 1990s. A learning organization is ‘ideal’ learning that all organizations aspire to achieve. It is a long journey of learning where all kinds of learning are incorporated, and it is where employees and employers learn to be productive, and to respect and value each other with the purpose of achieving a common goal. The following table is provided to explain the core of the learning organization concept. Senge (1996) argues that a learning organization has five principles. In a joint conference paper on Learning Organisations (2005) from Toronto summarized the principles of learning organization, incorporating it with best practices and the benefits thereof as follows:

Table 2.2: Principles of learning organization

Characteristic	Definition	Associated with Best Practices	Positive By-products
Self mastery – individual	The ability to honestly and openly see reality as it exists; to clarify one’s personal vision	1.Positive reinforcement from role models/managers 2.Sharing experiences 3.More interaction time between supervisory levels 4.Emphasis on feedback 5.Balance work/non-work life	Greater commitment to the organization and to work; less rationalization of negative events; ability to face limitations and areas for improvement; ability to deal with change
Mental models – individual	The ability to compare reality or personal	1.Time for learning 2.Reflective openness	Less use of defensive routines

	vision with perceptions, reconciling both into a coherent understanding	3.Habit of inquiry 4.Forgiveness of oneself 5.Flexibility/adaptability	in work; less reflexivity that leads to dysfunctional patterns of behaviour; less avoidance of difficult situations
Shared vision – group	The ability of a group of individuals to hold a shared picture of a mutually desirable future	1.Participative openness 2.Trust 3.Empathy towards others 4.Habit of dissemination 5.Emphasis on cooperation 6.A common language	Commitment over compliance, faster change, greater within group trust; less time spent on aligning interests; more effective communication flows
Team learning – group	The ability of a group of individuals to suspend personal assumptions about each other and engage in “dialogue” rather than “discussion”	1.Participative openness 2.Consensus building 3.Top-down and bottom-up communication flows; 4.Support over blame; 5.Creative thinking	Group self-awareness; heightened collective learning; learning “up and down” the hierarchy; greater cohesiveness; enhanced creativity
Systems thinking – group	The ability to see interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect; the ability to think in context and appreciate the consequences of actions on other parts of the system	1.Practicing self mastery 2.Possessing consistent mental models 3.Possessing a shared vision 4.Emphasis on team learning	Long-term improvement or change; decreased organizational conflict; continuous learning among group members; Revolutionary over evolutionary change

Adapted from the work of Senge (1990), Argyris and Schon (1996), Argyris (1991) and Schon (1983).

Learning organizations, according to Senge (1996, as cited by Jackson, 2007;3), are “...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire; where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured; where collective aspiration is set free; and where people are continually learning how to learn together”. Bouwer et al (2002) and William (1996) have taken the learning organizations principles further by designing a very useful evaluation model known as the 9-S framework. It was initially generated by McKinsey to evaluate learning organization. To verify whether MUT is a leading workplace learning organization, this generic 9-S evaluation model was utilized by incorporating the 9-S principles into the interview questions. Throughout the previous discussion, certain aspects of the 9-S model have been highlighted. For greater clarity, a brief description will be presented below.

2.9.1 The 9-S Framework Model

This planning-whilst-learning model characteristic was adapted from Bouwer et al., 2002.

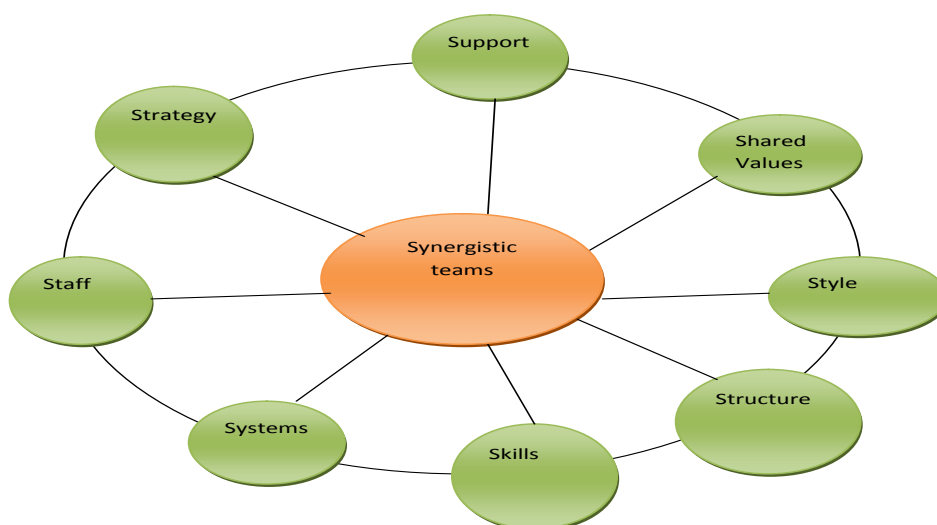


Figure 2.1: 9 – S Framework Model

2.9.2 Synergistic teams

Previous discussions have shown that learning organization is about collaboration and pulling of a team in the same direction. Synergistic teams form an important component of learning organization. Team learning, according to Senge (2007), is part of the core disciplines of learning organization. When teams come together, members learn from one another through meetings, planning sessions, and working on projects as task teams which in turn improve their way of working. According to Billet (2010), they solve problems which will probably result in a better team performance. He further argues that organizations are formed by a team of specialists in different fields and that good performance depends on both individual effort and on how teams work together. Billet (2010:132) further argues that “...teams diverse in expertise should perform better than homogenous groups, because they possess a broader range of task relevant knowledge, skills and abilities, giving the group a larger pool of resources”. This can be achieved in many forms, for instance, MUT Skills Development Unit has entered into partnership with the Information Communications Department (ICT) in training staff on computer literacy programme ICDL. The Skills Unit was also, at the time of the study, in the process of negotiating another partnership with the Communications and Office Technology Department to offer business writing skills for MUT secretaries.

2.9.3 Support

When employees in an organization are willing to learn, such learning is a sign of liveliness. However, an environment conducive to learning needs to be created. *Management Extra* magazine (2008) advises that a productive workplace has to be relaxed, and should allow people to learn from their mistakes. *Management Extra* magazine (2008:42) further specifies the kind of support an environment should provide:

- People should have clear objectives and know how their jobs fit into the bigger picture (strategic objective of the department and organizational objectives).
- Mistakes are seen as events from which people and the organization can learn.
- Individuals are respected and their inputs to process improvements are encouraged at every level.
- Regular feedback is provided, including praise for work well done.
- People are encouraged to talk and ask questions and seek clarification.
- Collaboration within and across teams is encouraged.
- Managers are available to provide advice and assistance when needed.

Senior managers and line management are regarded as stakeholders in training and development; hence, without their support training is likely to be unsuccessful. Starkey (1996: 362) also emphasizes that support is very important and states that "...the members should be encouraged to see themselves as critical providers of organizational knowledge through their enhanced learning capability". MUT is running a computer course for its staff called International Computer Driving License (ICDL). In this regard, Management has shown great support towards this intervention.

2.9.4 Shared Values

The logo that MUT has adopted shows that the institution is in pursuit of excellence. This is what the organization wants to be identified with and known for. Having a common goal will assist the institution to achieve this ideal; therefore, there is a need for shared values. Senge (1996) established shared values as one of the principles of a learning organization. Shared values rely on common understanding among team members, and on sharing information, values, and culture. Communities of practice are also an instrument of team learning and of sharing information and values. Culture as defined by Schon and Argyris (1996:327) "...is a kind of collective artefact which is continually formed and transformed". Clawson and Conner (2004) emphasize that shared values are instilled through culture, and that new members can be taught these shared values during induction and orientation sessions.

2.9.5 Style

Management or leadership style plays a very important role in creating learning organizations. Hitt (1996) argues that style or leadership style can be stifling or unleashing, restraining or freeing, inhibiting or encouraging, or threatening or supportive. Isles (2010) argue that leadership that is far sighted, visible, accessible, and open minded is required. MUT executive management has put an open door policy into practice; for instance, they allowed their staff to be trained in a computer literacy program called International Computer Driving License. Such initiatives reveal that Management has taken a stride towards believing in interactive planning and has the interests of its staff at heart. According to Hitt (1996:19), managers need to adopt new roles that are geared towards designing "...a learning organization and to be a catalyst in promoting effective learning".

2.9.6 Systems

Erasmus (2010) describes a system as a set of interdependent components such as a human body which is a system. If one part of the system is not functional, the whole system gets affected. MUT is therefore a system. Ackoff (1997), as cited by Jackson, (2007:234) states:

- Organizations are purposeful systems and have their own goals, objectives, and ideals that should be taken into consideration. (MUT: research teaching and learning and community engagement).
- They also contain parts of other purposeful systems: individuals, whose aspiration need to be met. (MUT: staff, stakeholders).
- They exist as parts of wider, purposeful systems whose interest also should be served (MUT: part of Higher Education Institution).

This definition depicts a number of important activities in the system that cannot be ignored or compromised. A system has interdependent factors. MUT is a fully fledged social system: it has staff such as executive management, stakeholders, shareholders, customers (students), runs a business (rendering education), and has an environment in which it operates (PESTEL). None of these aspects should be ignored, as the system will collapse if that happens; the whole is not greater than its parts. Bower (2002) recommends that a balance score card as developed by

Kaplan and Norton (1992) be used to assess the effectiveness of the system or organization. The following four main characteristics of a balance scorecard are highlighted: It is a top-down reflection of the organization's mission and strategy:

1. It is forward-looking in that it addresses current and future successes.
2. It integrates external and internal measurements.
3. It helps management to focus on critical success factors such as excellence, organizational renewal, financial performance, and customer satisfaction.

A prominent characteristic of the balance score card is the interdependence feature, such as those social systems are constructed through interaction. Jackson (2007; 154) states: "Social systems are constituted through the interaction of humans acting according to their different values and conceptions of reality". This involves sharing of knowledge and learning from each other, which only the management style, culture, and structure of the organization can make possible.

2.10 Structure

Organizational structures play an important role in the development and achievement of strategic objectives. Botha (2009) argues that most HEIs in South Africa such as MUT are composed of academic and support staff which sometimes makes it look as if there are two different entities operating on one premises. This is also prevalent in some areas like development and benefits. For instance, academics benefit financially from the skills development budget of the institute as well as from the special grant offered by the Department of Education. Organizational structure should encompass shared codes and dispositions, which team members constitute and reconstitute through their practices. Hong (1999) contends that structures have contradicting effects, whilst Ransol et al (2003) and Jongbloed (2002) argue that structures have both enabling and constraining factors. Structures support projects and individuals, but on the other hand the bureaucracy entrenched in structures could be very limiting and constraining at times. Senge (1996: 43) is aware of the structural impedances, as he states: "While all people have the capacity to learn, the structures in which they have to function are often not conducive to reflection and engagement". The structure of the organization can build or dampen the spirit of learning and learning organization. Organizations that are too bureaucratic may hinder the effectiveness of learning. Orderliness is important;

however; flexibility and spontaneity allow an organization to respond promptly to changes. Organizational structures should be used as an effective tool of communication. They should also be used as a means of reflection and engagement within the organization. Hitt (1996) and Hong (1999) encourage that structure should accommodate strategy and allow stability, flexibility, and learning opportunities. Isles (2010: 60) confirm this by stating that structure is important, but argues at the same time that "...there is no ideal structure".

2.10.1 Strategy

According to De Geus (1988, as cited by Hitt, 1996), planning is an opportunity for members of the management team to come together, where vision and mental models are shared. Strategic planning is the normal exercise that organizations have to undergo, but whether those plans are implemented or not is difficult to say. Hughes (2010:90) highlights that strategy is encompassing, as it involves "...the purpose, direction, choices, changes, governance, organization, and performance of organizations in their industry, market, social, economic and political contexts". A strategic planning process engages management in the process of intensive learning as they have to learn how the organization has performed in the past as well as in the present, and how they want to take the organization to perform in terms of profit margins. MUT Human Resources and Development Department recently engaged in strategic planning to which HR&D stakeholders were invited to become part of the changes the department wanted to make. The underlying purpose was to make participants aware that HR&D was transforming, and that transformation would change the status quo.

Through a collaborative process, information and values are shared and new mental models and vision are created. Hall (2010: 33) raises a concern that some organizations view strategy as a means to an end, and warns that "...a strategy without sufficient organizational capability gets you nowhere". The environment an organization operates in is often very turbulent, which demands that organizations continuously craft their strategy to fit the purpose. In most cases strategy is seen as the property of management, which is not necessarily true. Strategic thinking needs to be enforced among the whole community of the organization. This will ensure that

shared team learning, personal mastery, shared vision, and systems thinking take place, thereby changing an average organization into a learning organization.

2.10.2 Staff

According to Ortenblad (2001), employees form an integral part of organizations; organizations are what they are because of their staff. Marshall (2009) argues that through the human capital of the staff, an organization may move to prospective heights; hence organizations learn through their staff. Starkey (1996:302) states that honour and credits should be given to staff by encouraging them to see themselves as people who add value and are critical providers of organizational knowledge through their enhanced learning capability. Starkey (1996) lists the roles members of staff perform in an organization:

- They are responsible for experimentation.
- They are wise interpreters of collective knowledge.
- They are honoured participants in decision making.
- They are responsible for the needs of internal and external customers.

Staff members need to be treated as valued assets of the organization and have to be continuously serviced, since they carry important information about the organization which has to be continuously updated. MUT has incorporated staff development in its strategy in order to make it sustainable. A MUT strategic (2010) priority records: According Isles (2010:61), “The focus will be on the implementation of an integrated people development system to ensure the availability of skills when needed and to build employee competency and commitment to lifelong learning”. He further supports this and argues that some organizations are not paying adequate attention to development; instead, “...organizations invest a lot in planning and processes, often backed by expensive information technology (IT) systems, but ignore investment in staff, don’t think through the design of their jobs, and organize their workers poorly”. Employees are equal to or may be more important than the strategy; they are capable of crafting the strategy and implementing it. Hall (2008:33) emphasizes: “If you want systematic human capital growth, you must have an organization with leaders who will drive that growth”. However, although Isles (2010), Hall (2008), and Starkey (1996) value the importance of employees and their

contribution towards the growth of the organization, they do not mention how their value and skills need to be reinforced.

2.10.3 Skills

The underlying purpose of workplace learning is skills development. Ramson. (1996:35) state: “Skills development and the strategic deployment of skills in the workplace require that learners must construct the goals and sequence of actions that are most efficient in moving through a problem space”. Workers need to be constantly learning at work and be able to apply their learning efficiently. Developing effective workplace performance requires workers to extend their skills, modify attitudes, and update their capabilities. Burns (2002) argues that the new skills that are needed to deal with constant change include learning to learn, problem finding / solving, creative thinking, managing personal and professional growth, speaking and listening effectively, interpersonal skills including teamwork and negotiation skills, and influencing skills. MUT is committed to skills development; however, it does not know what skills it has at its disposal as a skills audit has not been done. A skills audit is an investigation to determine what skills an organization possesses compared to the skills it needs to perform. Erasmus et al (2010:148) list the questions that should precede a skills audit as follows:

- What skills actually exist within the enterprise?
- How do they compare with the organizational skills requirements as determined through the workforce planning and job analyses process?
- What are the skills development priorities?
- How may the skills development priorities be best addressed through a systematic plan, and when?
- What are the key success indicators / measures of the workplace skills plan?
- How can progress be implemented, tracked and monitored?
- What should be reported to management and the relevant SETA?

As a skills development practitioner, I have noticed that the process of a skills audit is time consuming and expensive, yet it has good dividends. If MUT is serious about skills development, it needs to revisit the idea of conducting a skills audit; otherwise

it is running the risk of pouring resources into areas where they might be less needed.

2.10.4 Is MUT a Learning Organization?

The literature has shown what MUT is doing in terms of workplace learning which, in the researcher's view, does not necessarily qualify MUT as a learning organization. Erasmus et al (2010:256) collated information from various sources to describe the qualities of a learning organization as follows:

- The learning organization has a shared vision of the future, and challenges its people to change and contribute to it.
- It integrates work and learning and seeks quality, excellence, and continuous improvement.
- It mobilizes human talent by putting emphasis on learning, as well as on education and training planned for this purpose.
- It empowers people.
- It learns and re-learns constantly to be innovative, inventive, and invigorating.
- It invests in its future through the education and training of all its people.
- Learning is an integrated, continuous, strategically-used process.
- 'Systems thinking' is fundamental in learning organizations.
- The corporate climate encourages, rewards, and accelerates individual and group learning.
- There is continuous access to information and data sources.
- Well-developed core competencies exist that serve as a take-off point for new projects and initiatives.
- The learning organization seeks to integrate tasks and people factors. The needs of people are continuously identified and strategies are developed to align these needs with organizational goals and strategies.
- Learning organizations study their competitors and other enterprises, both locally and abroad, in order to learn from industry trends and developments.
- Special efforts are made to use the most advanced technology to improve business processes, products, and services.

There is something remarkable about the above points: they demand that the organization should be a social system since it recognizes all the features of a social system as referred to in Chapter one. MUT is acknowledged as a social system; this means that even if workplace learning is not effective currently, the possibility for such a system exists.

The statements about learning organizations as expounded above formed the basis for the questions that were posed to respondents in this research study. Positive responses would confirm that MUT was a leading learning workplace, whereas negative responses would give MUT the incentive to improve and to engage vigorously in learning.

2.11 Conclusion

The literature review revealed that workplace learning is a process which may lead to a successful organization with a robust competitive advantage. Workplace learning encourages organizations to be open to changes and opportunities, and to acknowledge that employees are important assets. The only way that organizations may learn is through their employees.

The literature also revealed that there is a fine line between the learning organization and workplace learning; both these concepts ultimately are about expediting change and performance, as well as about retaining knowledge in the organization.

The changes brought about by workplace learning or learning organization basically rely entirely on the culture, structure, and willingness of the staff to embrace learning. Billet (2002:469) states that organizations such as MUT "...need to think about ways in which workplaces can contribute to learners' development on their own terms; in particular, how the access to activities that variously reinforce, refine, or extend learners' knowledge is distributed across the workplace". As a skills practitioner at MUT, the researcher noted some deficiencies in the literature as well as in MUT practices; the literature is quiet about evaluation and return on investment, which is important as the government and an organization like MUT spend a lot of money on skills development. Moreover, the literature does not show any correlation between workplace learning / learning organization and promotion. It was one area of focus of this study to see how MUT staff felt about workplace learning and promotion

prospects. The findings are explored in Chapter four, and are based on the data that was obtained during interviews.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, a literature review investigated a wide range of learning concepts as well as the concept of workplace learning. Prompted by this investigation, the title selected for this study was *Leading workplace learning: a case of Mangosuthu University of Technology*. As Skills Development facilitator at MUT, I conceptualized a research plan according to which the project would unfold. This chapter presents and justifies the research methods and research tools that were used in the execution of the study. In an attempt to present research results that would be both valid and reliable, every effort was made to ensure that bias was minimized and that the research would be authentic. According to Paul and Ormrod (2010) bias is an element that can cripple the integrity of a good research project in various ways.

The focus of the research design and methodology fell on explicitly giving direction, but still not losing sight of the research objectives. The research objectives of this study were as follows:

- To examine the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed.
- To determine whether workplace learning at MUT impacted performance management.
- To determine the measures MUT's measures MUT have in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory.

3.2 Key Questions

The key questions to be answered in this study were:

- How could workplace learning be improved at MUT to meet the characteristics of a Learning Organization?
- How could knowledge be best managed to improve workplace learning at MUT?

3.3 Research Design

According to Trochim (2006:2), research design: “Provides the glue that holds the research project together. [It is] to structure the research to show how all of the major parts of the research project, and the samples or group measured treatments or programs, work together to try to address the central research questions”. The research design distinctively distinguishes research projects from any other literature, since it presents a rationale for the inclusion of any component in the study. The collection of data in research is purposeful and should adhere to research principles. Research design is therefore a plan that expounds on how the study was conducted to verify or refute assumptions.

An interpretative approach was adopted for this research study. According to Jackson (2007:211), an interpretative approach is when: “People are seen as possessing free will, rather than as being subject to forces beyond control; and this implies they must be centrally involved in any attempt to change and improve the system they create”. An interpretative approach correlates with action research since action research encourages people to be involved in creating and implementing knowledge. Greenwood and Levin (1997:1) assert that “...action research can help us build a better, freer, fairer society through collaborative problem analysis and problem solving in context”. However, in this instance the purpose of action research was to improve my own practice which I believe will have a positive impact on MUT workplace learning. Both action research and the interpretative approach encourage democratic principles and the buy-in of the people, and they give the researcher the scope to manage and interpret data that will be to the benefit of the people or the organization.

As stated in the objectives and key questions, the ultimate purpose of this study was to facilitate improvements that would benefit MUT as a whole. Hence the study was based on practitioner research where the practitioner sought to improve the practice in the organization.

Hardman and Averweg (2011:379) state: “The underlying question on the mind of a researcher is: Given the continuing technical change in an organization, how can the researcher improve what is happening in a selected environment?” This was precisely the underlying purpose for conducting this study.

The research process attempted to explore the best possible ways of improving workplace learning at MUT. Therefore an exploratory design was followed which allowed the use of case studies, semi-structured questions, and surveys. The study explored the attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour of the employees of MUT with regards to workplace learning, using a case study approach. According to Yin (1989 and 1993, as cited by Remenyi, 2002), "...a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". Leedy and Ormord (2010:137) suggest that "...a case study may be useful for investigating how an individual or an organization changes over time, perhaps as the result of certain circumstances or interventions". Using case studies is not mere story writing / telling, but it is an observation of the status quo and comes with constructive changes. Therefore, understanding the background, the environment, history, economy, politics, and any other information to be found within the organization is of paramount importance (Remenyi et al, 2002). Case studies are either used to understand certain theory, to support theory, or to reject theory. Harre (1972, as cited by Remenyi et al, 1998:169) insists that "...we cannot describe the world in the absence of any prior understanding of it [i.e., conducting a case study] in the absence of any theory.

Triangulation serves many purposes namely validity and reliability. Leedy and Ormord (2010:137) contends that case studies are flexible; they may be combined with any other research method like observation, interviewing, survey and others with the intention of achieving authenticity. Remenyi et al (1998:167) further insist that "...case studies provide real-time information that can be as up to date as the researcher requires, making this approach ideal for contemporary issues and [making it] especially relevant in the fast-changing world of business and management studies".

3.5 Research Instruments

A researcher has the responsibility of choosing the right methodology that will suit the purpose of research. Jackson (2007:211) advises that "...a methodology should be geared towards getting as close as possible to what is going on, preferably by getting 'inside people's heads' to find out and influence what they are thinking". In

research, two methods may be used: either a qualitative or a quantitative method. However, these methods may be mixed for the purpose of triangulation. According to Trochim (2006:3), triangulation is “...the studies of using different methods to achieve the same purpose, with a view to providing corroborating evidence for the conclusions drawn; this is as a technique of validation”. This technique was employed in this study, where a survey was complemented with data obtained from a focus group.

3.6 Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

According to Miles, (1979) as cited by Ghauri and Grønhaug, 1995: 87), “...qualitative data are attractive for many reasons. Such data are rich, full, earthy, holistic, and real. Their face validity seems unimpeachable, they preserve chronological flow where that is important, and they suffer minimally for retrospective distortion. In principle, such data offer a far more precise way to assess causality in organizational affairs than arcane efforts like cross-lagged correlations”. The qualitative method is mostly employed in action research where people are part of the planned change.

Below is a table that compares the characteristics of the quantitative and qualitative methods as adopted from Minichiello and Kottler (2010:19):

Table 3.1: Key Characteristics of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Character	Qualitative method	Quantitative method
Conceptual framework	Concerned with understanding people’s experiences from the perspective of the participants	Concerned with discovering facts in terms of cause-effects
Assumptions	Assumes a dynamic and negotiated reality	Assumes a fixed and measurable reality.
Reasoning processes	Inductive (from specific to general) and circular, alternating back and forth between data, analysis, and literature	Deductive (from general to specific) and linear, operating in a sequential series of progressive

		steps.
Methodology	Data collected through observations of what is happening in the real world, or talking with people in a conversational style	Data collected by measuring things via instruments or conducting experiments
Participants' role	Active informants about their experiences and perceptions	Subjects of experiments or respondents to questions
Primary tools	Interviews, focus groups, observations, review of documents	Transferability
Sampling	Small strategic samples not presumed to represent population	Large samples, randomly selected, presumed to represent larger groups
Data analysis	Data reported in words or text, analyzed by themes	Data reported via numerical values and then statistically analyzed
Data classification	Coded and classified into themes and concepts	Classified by variables
Outcomes	Synthesized themes and lead to rich descriptions, models, and theories.	Hypotheses tested between independent and dependent variables.

For the purpose of this research, both methods were employed, which meant the usage of cross-sectional surveys where data were collected to represent a larger population.

3.6.1 Survey

The rationale behind using a survey of this nature went beyond the fulfilment of academic requirements in order to get to the core challenges of the Skills

Development unit. It was argued that the findings would assist MUT to improve the Skills Development unit in the HRandD department. The survey was deemed an appropriate method of testing the waters to determine how far the institution had come in terms of reflecting on the characteristics of a learning organization. Secondly, it addressed the question in terms of what needs to be done to put the institution at that desired level. Leedy and Ormrod (2010:187) state that "...survey research involves acquiring information about one or more groups of people - perhaps about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, or previous experience - by asking them questions and tabulating their answers". Surveys may be descriptive or analytic, and it is an advantage to have a survey that reflects both characteristics (Ghuri and Grønhaug, 1995; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). To capture the content of the literature review aligned with the concepts of the research, the questions used in the survey were carefully structured. To ascertain face validity, the following types of surveys were used: category survey, list and multiple choice surveys, scale ranking, and open ended. An online survey was conducted using the Blackboard web-based tool.

Blackboard LLC was first introduced by Matthew Pittinsky and Michael Chasen in 1997 for online learning application. It has been evolving over the years but initially, as Jefferies and Grodzinsky (2007:4) state: "Blackboard itself is an integrated set of web-based tools designed for the creation and management of a learning environment". There are many advantages of using Blackboard (BLACKBOARD, accessed 8/07/11) as recommended on several websites, such as:

- Excellent anonymity protection for respondents
- Offers a variety of question formats
- Able to create a printable survey version
- Respondents can save their progress and continue later
- Qualitative analysis possible
- Allows for survey responses to be automatically emailed to the researcher as they are collected
- Allows simple data analysis, publishing in Word or Web reports and conversions of data into Excel or SPSS.
- Provides downloadable charts in graphs of questions responses.

These advantages also verify the validity and reliability perspectives.

In this research project two administrators were utilized. The first person was responsible for uploading and deploying the questions (survey) to respondents. The second person was responsible for allocating codes, assisting respondents with the program, and attending to any queries respondents might have. Both administrators work in the Information Communications Technology Department at MUT and are experts in the programme.

To revert to action research and the interpretative approach, a focus group was used as a means of triangulation.

3.7 Focus group

Data collection from focus groups employs mainly a qualitative method, which assists in obtaining the in-depth views of the respondents. The acceptable number of persons per focus group as recommended by Ghauri and Grønhaug (1995) is fewer than ten members. Focus group surveys allow for interaction among the group. It needs to be properly planned to allow constructive argument. The researcher may conduct the survey or obtain an efficient facilitator to conduct the session. Thomas (2006:170) advises that the researcher should always bear in mind "...that the aim is to facilitate or moderate discussion among participants, not between yourself and the participants". Sometimes the researcher may purposely or unintentionally influence the discussion towards his / her direction.

3.7.1 Advantages of focus groups

According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (1995:109), some of the advantages of using a focus group are:

- It produces very rich and in-depth data expressed in respondents' own words and reactions, which is normally difficult to obtain using other methods.
- It is a quick, flexible, and inexpensive method of data collection.
- It gives the researcher a chance to observe the reactions of people in open and free conversation with each other.

- It allows the researcher to interact directly with respondents and to react and build upon the discussion as it goes.

In this research project, a focus group was used to corroborate or refute the findings of the survey that had been conducted. This was done as the research employed was action research, meaning that the views of practitioners would be important. The focus group was used to determine the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the findings obtained from the survey questionnaire.

3.8 Sampling

Qualitative research sampling normally does not require a large number of respondents due to its nature of exploring complex human issues. Other understandable reasons for fewer participants are:

- The researcher has to have some background knowledge of the respondents in terms of their values, culture, beliefs, and attitude.
- It is an undisputable fact that some people are more informative than others; for instance, two people may have worked for the same organization for the same period of time, but they have been doing different jobs in different departments. For various reasons these two individuals may not have the same detailed information about the organization.
- It is likely that the selected respondents may refer the researcher to other, more informed practitioners which may result in a snowball effect.

Marshall and Martin (1996) recommend that two different methods of sampling under the non-probability category be utilized. These are:

3.8.1 Convenience sampling

This sampling method is generally cheaper, requires less effort, and the researcher is able to assess who will be suitable respondents.

3.8.2 Judgment sampling

In this method, the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question. Moreover, experts may recommend others that will result in a

snowball effect. It is more strategic, you know who you are targeting, and what value they are likely to add to the investigation.

3.9. Rationale for the content of questions in the questionnaire

In my effort to achieve an unbiased view, the questions I posed to the respondents in the study were prompted by the focus of the discussions around workplace learning in the foregoing chapters to ensure a correlation with the research objectives. The kind of questions that were asked will be discussed to establish their correlation with the research study. The questions were constructed to assist the researcher in determining the intensity and extent of workplace learning at MUT, using the theoretical literature as a point of departure. The questions were presented in different categories, i.e., biographical data, the extent to which MUT workplace learning was strategically informed, establishing whether performance management impacted workplace learning at MUT, and how MUT retained its knowledge management.

3.3 Biographical Details of Respondents

No significant correlation between the theoretical literature and the biographical details of MUT could be established; however, the internal reports that are generated at the institution are not complete without this particular information. This type of information measures the equity in the implementation of skills development in the institution. Given the apartheid background of South Africa, the issue of equality is still delicate, and therefore needed to be addressed.

Question 1: Age categories of respondents

The age profile of respondents in this instance may assist in various ways like to:

- To alert the organisation of equity issues and recruitment and retaining of staff
- To alert the organisation with issues of development as if an imbalance exists between older and younger employees, it may mean that the organization is not taking cognizance of career-pathing and transferability of skills.

Question 2: It is important to know and understand the implications of racial grouping are in an organisation. When compiling workplace skills plan and annual

training reports, this kind of information is required. This is also equally important for the purpose of this study . .

Racial issues in South African are persistent as our democracy is still in tender age. For the purposes this study such a question was asked to determine whether racial groups perceive workplace learning differently.

Question 3: Gender

Again the purpose was to address equity issues and to determine whether workplace learning is perceived differently.

Question 4: Education level

This category was deemed significant in terms of the theoretical literature as MUT strives to employ academics with a minimum qualification at Master's level.

Question 5: Occupational sphere

This question held no significance in terms of the theoretical literature *per se*; however, the responses provided important information in the light of the objectives of the study. It is a fact that university staff members are divided into different spheres of expertise. However, all staff members need to be part of workplace learning as they all contribute to the development and productivity of the university.

Question 6: Years of experience

This question was important because it correlates with the concepts of sharing of information, knowledge management, and institutional memory. After the quality and standards of employees have been developed, they need to be retained in order to add value to the organization.

3.4 Objective 1: To examine the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed.

Question 7: Encouragement of workplace learning

Employees need to be encouraged to actively take ownership of their development. In this regard, MUT has a strategic objective that addresses the development of staff. A focus of the study was to see if this was in fact happening.

Question 8: Do employees submit their training needs when asked to do so?

The training of staff is informed by the information that the staff themselves submit to the Skills Development unit in terms of their personal development plans.

Question 9: Does the Skills Development unit attend to training needs of staff?

When staff members have submitted their training needs, the training needs are analyzed and only the training needs that are aligned with the needs of the organization are attended to. People whose needs are rejected or not attended to often get frustrated and are discouraged from submitting their requirements again.

Question 10: What reasons do staff members have for not attending the training provided?

As mentioned earlier, MUT is committed to the development of its staff. However, it is sometimes very discouraging to find that training sessions that have been organized are poorly attended, or not attend at all. In most cases the training fee is paid up-front, and when a staff member cancels, a cancellation fee has to be paid. Time spent organizing training sessions cannot be reversed and in some instances that opportunity becomes available only once a year.

Question 11: Evaluation of training attended

Training and learning should be purposeful and attendees should be responsive, therefore it is important that employees are satisfied with the standard of the training. It also makes good business sense to check the return on investment in terms of the training intervention undertaken.

Questions 12: How supportive is the MUT's workplace learning environment?

As much as MUT claims to value the development of staff, it was deemed important to determine whether respondents perceived the environment as conducive to workplace learning or not. Line managers are supposed to be encouraging learning that will improve the performance of the department as well as develop the employees. The responses would also reveal the management style and support that line managers are providing.

Question 13: Is MUT workplace learning strategically focused?

Disorientated learning does not impact the development of the organization, as has been highlighted in Chapter two. Workplace learning should be responsive and aligned to the goals and objectives of the organization.

Question 14: Is MUT's workplace learning environment sensitive to the development staff needs?

For any staff development to take place the organisation need to take care of that as developed workers benefit the organisation tremendously.

Question 15: Is MUT's workplace learning environment ineffective?

The workplace environment has an important role to play in the development of workers, so it ought to be effective.

Question 16: Understanding of MUT strategy by staff

Strategies are plans or maps that give informed, detailed directions in terms of the operationalization of an organization's policies and goals. It is therefore of paramount importance that employees understand the organization's strategy so that they can work towards achieving its strategic goals.

Question 17: Applicability of strategic priorities to staff

For a strategy of the organisations to be successful need to be owned by all inhabitants of an organisation, this question seeks to verify whether MUT employees understand the strategy of their institution.

Question 18: Understanding of policies

MUT has various policies which form an essential part of an institution's so-called 'code of conduct'. Knowing and understanding organizational policies is important since policies give employees certain rights but also present some restrictions. Understanding the policies means employees understand the organizational rules and ethics.

Question 19: Transformation of Mangosuthu Technikon (Mantec) into a university of Technology

Change and transformation need to be planned and should be purposeful. In the process of change, an organization undergoes many stages. Change comes with many expectations in terms of strategy, structure, leadership style, operational strategy, and other aspects. It was important to determine the respondents' perceptions regarding the viability and effectiveness of the process of change that the institution experienced.

Question 20: Noticeable changes since the implementation of 2010-2020 strategy

This question is meant to investigate whether the 2010-2020 MUT has been implemented and whether workers are noticing any of changes in this effect.

Question 21: Is HR&D doing things differently?

HRandD department almost in all organisation are the drivers of change, should they not be seen doing things differently that might be viewed change is not yet implemented.

3.4 Objective 2: To determine what measures MUT have in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory

Questions 22: Knowledge management and information sharing

Knowledge and skills are the end product of learning. Knowledge is a valuable asset of an organization that needs to be protected. It is for this reason that questions around knowledge management and information sharing were asked.

Question 23: Are you studying this year?

This question tries to verify how many people are studying in this current year the responses of this question will be correlated with question 4 on education level, as well as questions on the implementation of 2010-2020 which seeks to encourage learning and upgrading of qualifications in the institution.

Question 24: How does the attainment of formal qualification assist MUT?

This question seeks to determine the perception of staff in as far as upgrading of qualification is concerned MUT, as attaining of qualification will assist this academic developing institution. It should be noted that it is not only academics that are

expected to attain higher qualification also the support staff are expected to do something for the entire organisation to perform better.

Question 25: Attitude towards knowledge sharing

One attitude determines ones behaviour, meaning if people have good attitude towards learning there are many chances that they will share their knowledge.

Question 26: Knowledge sharing occurs at MUT

The behaviour of knowledge sharing is the one that will determine that MUT becomes a learning organisation.

Question 27: Are you a member of a community practice (CoP) in your field of expertise?

MUT as a knowledge institution, it is important to investigate whether its employees do seek to get more knowledge or strengthens it through other means like CoPs.

Question 28: Is your supervisor aware of your membership status in a community of practice?

For workplace to prosper management ought to encourage it and support it.

Question 29: What does the MUT lose when employees resign?

In general Institutions tend to lose skills and knowledge if one thinks of institutional memory, when employees resign; this question seeks to determine whether that is the case at MUT.

Question 30: Sharing of knowledge with fellow colleagues is important in improving ones and performance.

This question correlates sharing of knowledge and performance which is the ultimate purpose of learning. If people work in teams there should be team learning which in Senge (2006) is known as shared vision, which breeds high performance.

Question 31: There is a relationship between workplace learning and knowledge management.

The study wants to emphasize the relationship between workplace learning and knowledge management and in this instance the aim is to determine whether employees of MUT do realise this relationship. Their understandings to this effect assume that they have understanding of workplace learning.

3.5. Objective 3: To Determine whether workplace learning at MUT impacted performance management

Questions 32: Performance management at MUT has an impact on workplace learning?

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are many benefits associated with performance management in the development of organizations. Performance management plays an integral part in workplace learning. Moreover, this is where personal plans are developed. At the time of the study, MUT was still working on its performance management system and the process had not been completed.

Question 33: The absence of a performance management system has a negative impact on workplace learning.

This question seeks to verify whether MUT employees do realise the relationship that exist between these two variables dependant workplace learning as that may lead to a understanding that they (staff) want meaningful learning.

Question 34: Change management has an impact on workplace learning.

These variables are related as change leads to learning new things and learning leads to change. If MUT staff may realise this, it will expedite workplace learning in remarkable ways.

Question 35: When Mantec changed to MUT many other things had to change.

It is important that people are able to notice change as this means they are concerned or observant of the development taking place in their organisation.

Question 36: To have open information sessions (symposium) at MUT will be help staff members share knowledge.

Information sharing gatherings are normally conducted in academic institution, and this question seeks to investigate whether these sessions are seen in that light by staff.

Question 37: What are considered to be components of learning organisation?

The purpose of this question is to verify whether MUT employees understand the building blocks of learning organisation.

Question 38: MUT is setting itself as a learning organisation

This question suggests that MUT has already started asserting itself as a learning organisation, do employees of MUT notice the indicators of the strides MUT has taken.

Question 39: Views on workplace learning.

This was an open-ended question where the responded were to express their views on workplace learning at MUT without being guarded by specific questions, this will allow to get their attitude towards workplace learning.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered the research methods that were utilized during data collection. It has also provided justification for using the research methods and research tools discussed above. An attempt was made to provide the rationale using a practitioner research and the kinds of questions that were utilised in the questionnaire. The following chapter contains data analysis and the results interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will present the results of the study. The results recorded in the following section are presented as they were found: without bias and modification to suit intended or desired outcomes. This is important not only as an ethical code for scientific research, but also as a premise from which major decisions can be made for employees in the selected university.

The focus of this chapter will firstly be on the characteristics of the sample. This section is important in two ways: firstly, for clarifying the nature of the environment within which the research study was conducted, and secondly to enable other researchers who may want to replicate the study to understand the qualities and nature of the sample units that were part of the sample. The latter rationale is important as it will ensure that no confounding results are achieved in replicating the study, and / or differences can be explained.

It was envisaged at the onset of the study that 55 questionnaires would be administered. However, due to technological challenges, only 32 were dispatched to targeted participants. Of the 32 respondents who received the questionnaire, only 25 responded. The system / programme that was used for data collection is called Blackboard, which was discussed in Chapter four. The questionnaire was administered online with two technical administrators monitoring the system closely. They were able to check the progress as to how many people had opened the system. They could also check how many had fully completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised of 37 questions which had been composed to generate the biographical and academic details of the participants. Academic questions and the last section had been structured to address the objectives of the study.

4.2 Limitations of the study

4.2.1 Challenges in the research site

The intention was to send the questionnaire to participants in June 2011. However, in the second week of June (13 June 2011), strike action commenced at the institution. The strike action lasted for five weeks. It is a known fact that before and after a strike there are always tensions and fear as well as an inevitable work backlog. People are not always receptive to research questionnaires. As much as the sampling method that was used for this study was convenient sampling and judgmental sampling under non-probability sampling, challenges were nevertheless encountered. These extended to the kind of respondents who were willing to participate, and it was particularly difficult to elicit responses from people in management due to the strike action. Information Technology Network (ITN) staff, who are responsible for the maintenance of staff members' computers, were also part of the strike, which means that their backlog had a direct impact on my data collection. Most people complained that their personal computers were not functioning properly, which explains why many did not receive the questionnaires. The list of possible respondents was prepared; however, an exercise of verifying the availability of respondents was a challenge and administrators had to call and email, reminding respondents to complete and return the questionnaires.

4.2.2. Technological challenges

The technological challenges were a limitation of this study as only 25 of the potential 55 respondents completed the questionnaire. Some staff reported that their personal computers were not functioning and thus they could not complete the questionnaire.

4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

The characteristics of the respondents are presented to enable the reader to understand the qualities and parameters of the study units. The conclusions drawn from this study also have indications of the nature of the sample that participated in the study. This may assist other researchers who may want to utilize the results to

facilitate similar programmes, as they will be aware of the similarities and differences between their environment and the one in which this research was conducted.

4.3.1 Biographical details of respondents

Table 4.1: Age rate of respondents

35 years and younger	15
35-54 years	12
55 years and older	5
Unanswered	0

Table 4.1 shows that most (15) of the respondents fell in the age range of 35 years and younger. The next group (12) fell within the age range of 35 to 54 years, and the smallest group (5) was 55 years and older. These findings were obtained from responses to question 6 of the questionnaire. In terms of age and experience, the large group of younger respondents is significant, as it is a contention that the younger generation needs to learn from the older generation, in so far as mentoring is concerned. Knowledge management plays an important role in workplace learning, therefore understanding the organizational profile helps in planning further development of staff.

Table 4.1: Race

Black	30
Coloured	0
Indian	2
White	0
Other	0
Unanswered	0

Table 4.2 shows that most (30) of the respondents were black Africans, followed by Indians at only 2. No representatives of other race groups participated in the study.

MUT staff is predominantly black and only a few (2) Coloureds and Whites are employed by the institution. An effort was made in the sampling to have all racial groups presented; however; there is a reasonable number of respondents who chose not to participate in this exercise. This posed a challenge in terms of respondents of racial diversity, and in this regard the university may need to revisit its recruitment strategy, as through diversity we learn.

Table 4.3: Gender

Male	14
Female	18
Unanswered	0

Table 4.3 shows that most (18) of the respondents were women, whereas (14) were men. This is reflective of the South African population where women are predominant (Statistics SA, 2011). Besides issues of equity, it is interesting that women are taking workplace learning seriously, as women have been previously disadvantaged.

Table 4.4: Education level

Below Grade 12	0
Matric (Grade 12)	0
Certificate	0
Diploma	8
Degree	4
B. Tech	9
Masters and PhDs	10
Unanswered	1

Table 4.4 shows that the majority (8) of the respondents had a diploma qualification. The next group (10) had a Masters or PhD qualification, followed by (9) who had a B.Tech qualification. The next group (4) held a degree, whereas the smallest group (1) did not indicate their qualification level. The qualification levels and rates reported are also a true reflection of MUT, as the institution has recently converted to university status. Most lecturers are still studying towards their Masters degree, as the institution has enshrined a clause in its policies that the minimum qualification for lectures will be a Masters degree. To encourage academic development among its staff, MUT pays 75% for registration and tuition towards undergraduate qualifications and 100% towards Masters and PhD studies. This information was obtained from MUT strategy priority number one, which refers to the developing and retaining of quality employees. Education level variable has a direct relationship with the dependant variables on question 13 which talks of strategy focus MUT where, 12 respondents viewed MUT workplace as strategically focused.

Table 4.5: Occupational spheres

Academic	14
Non-Academic	18
Unanswered	0

Table 4.5 shows that most (18) of the respondents were located in non-academic fields, whereas 14 were in the academic field. These results reflect that the non-academics are willing to part of improving the workplace; this is irrespective of age and gender.

Table 4.6: Years of experience at MUT

Less than 1 year	4
1-5 years	10
6-9 years	5
10 years and more	13
Unanswered	0

Table 4.6 shows that most (10) of the respondents had been with the Institution between 1 to 5 years. The group with the second longest tenure (13) had been

employed for 10 years and more years. This group was followed by the group with 6 to 9 years' experience at MUT (5) whereas only four (4) had been in service for less than 1 year. Years of experience are an independent variable which could be correlated dependant variables of performance management, knowledge management and change management. This is from the observation that the majority of the respondents have served MUT for more than 10 years, which means in relation to this study, workplace taking place in this institution is meaningful.

4.4 Presentation of results in line with the objectives of the study

Results on investigating the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed.

Table 4.7: Encouragement of workplace learning at MUT

Yes	24
No	4
Unsure	4
Unanswered	0

Table 4.7 shows that most (24) of the respondents felt that workplace learning was encouraged at MUT, whereas four (4) felt that it was not encouraged. There were, four (4) respondents who were unsure whether it was encouraged or not. This finding was not surprising, given that some respondents had spent less than a year at MUT. If 24 respondents perceive workplace learning as being encouraged; their attitude towards workplace learning will be positive. Further, if this is correlated with the independent variable of years of experience as indicated above it could be confirmed that workplace learning is encouraged.

Table 4.8: Response to training needs in October 2010

I did not see the invitation	3
I am discouraged to submit since my training needs have never been attended to	6
I am busy this year; I will submit next time	4
I submitted	19

Unanswered	0
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Table 4.8 the number of respondents (19) reveals submitted their training needs in October 2010 this means MUT staff are willing to be developed and they also view workplace learning as being encouraged as the results of question 7 (table 4.7) confirms. Of the respondents, six (6) did not submit since they had received training earlier, four (4) could not make time for such training, and the smallest group three (3) had not seen an invitation. It is assumed that the reason they did not see the invitation to submit was because of technological challenges, as invitations had been sent electronically.

Table 4.9: Respondents' views on training needs attended to by the Skills Development unit

Yes	19
No	13
Unanswered	0

Table 4.9 the results shows that Skills Unit is serious with workplace as (19) respondents' training were attended to. These results also correlate with results on table 4.7 where a majority felt that workplace learning is encouraged at MUT. In the rationale for asking this question in the previous chapter it was stated that, only relevant training needs are attended to. It must be training needs that assist MUT achieve its strategic objectives. Therefore; it is assumed that the training needs of the 13 respondents fall under those whose training needs were not strategically focused.

Table 5.10: Respondents' reasons for not attending the HRandD-approved training programme

Training time clashed with my schedule	6
Line Manager obstructed my application	4
Short notice given	0
Other	22
Unanswered	0

Table 4.10 shows that most (22) of the respondents had other reasons other than the ones listed for not attending HRandD-approved training programmes, followed by 16 who did not attend because the training time clashed with their schedule. A smaller group four (4) did not attend because their Line Manager prevented them from attending the training programme. Twenty two is quite a high number, which correlates very well with the observation that was highlighted in chapter where it was mentioned that records reflects that some staff do not attend schedule training. This has a bad impact on the Skills Unit budget and defeats the purpose of workplace learning.

Table 4.11: Respondents' evaluation of the last training programme attended.

Programme was interesting	29
Programme was of poor quality	1
Programme was not relevant	1
The facilitator lacked facilitation skills	1
Unanswered	0

Table 4.11 shows that most (29) of the respondents felt that the training programme was interesting; this means that they learnt something. There was an equal number - i.e., one (1) - who felt that the training programme was poor, not relevant, or that the facilitator lacked facilitation skills. These results also confirms results on 4.7 on encouragement of workplace learning, that workplace is meaningful and purposeful therefore the Skills unit is informed with workplace learning.

Table 4.12: Respondents' views on the supportiveness of MUT's workplace learning environment

Strongly agree	9
Agree	10
Neither agree nor disagree	6
Disagree	5

Strongly disagree	1
Not applicable	1
Unanswered	0

Table 4.12 shows that most (10) of the respondents agreed that in their opinion the MUT workplace environment was supportive. This was followed by nine (9) respondents who strongly agreed with this statement. A group of six (6) neither agreed nor disagreed, whereas five (5) did not agree that the MUT workplace was supportive. One respondent strongly disagreed or felt that the workplace environment was not applicable to him/her. It can be concluded that MUT staff are satisfied with the workplace learning in this institution, this is confirmed by the results in 4.7., 4.11 and 4.9 respectively. However, there are respondents who felt the workplace learning environment is not effective. This requires improvement on the side of the Skills Unit and Skills Practitioner.

Table 4.13: Respondents' views on whether MUT's workplace learning environment was strategically focused

Strongly agree	5
Agree	12
Neither agree nor disagree	6
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	3
Not applicable	1
Unanswered	0

Table 4.13 shows that most (12) of the respondents agreed that the MUT workplace learning environment was strategically focused, followed by six (6) who neither agreed nor disagreed. A group of five (5) strongly agreed, whereas another five (5) disagreed and one (1) strongly disagreed. Interestingly, one of the respondents thought that this question was not applicable to him/her. The majority felt that MUT's workplace environment is strategically focused, which correlates with 4.7, and 4.12, these results show that MUT employees enjoy workplace learning in this institution.

Table 4.14: Respondents' views on whether MUT's workplace learning environment was sensitive to the development of the needs of the staff

Strongly agree	5
Agree	16
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	3
Not applicable	1
Unanswered	0

Table 4.14 shows that most (16) of the respondents agreed that the MUT workplace learning environment was sensitive to the development of staff needs, followed by five (5) who strongly agreed. A group of four (4) disagreed and an equal number three (3) strongly disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed (1). Interestingly, one (1) argued that that this was not applicable to him/her. There is a good relationship that prevails in the results of question 7, 12 and 13; which shows that MUT is doing a tremendous work in as far as workplace learning is concerned.

Table 4.15: Respondents' views on whether MUT's workplace learning environment was ineffective

Strongly agree	4
Agree	3
Neither agree nor disagree	5
Disagree	16
Strongly disagree	4
Not applicable	0
Unanswered	0

Table 4.15 shows that most (16) of the respondents disagreed that the MUT workplace learning environment was ineffective in developing staff needs. The next largest group (5) neither agreed nor disagreed, whereas an equal number of four (4) strongly disagreed or strongly agreed. The smallest group (3) agreed. The purpose

of this question was to double check whether or not respondents understand workplace learning. The results were positive and proved that respondents understand the value of workplace learning in this institution, and are willing to accept and adapt in changes. Learning cannot be divorced from change; learning and change are two sides of a coin.

Table 4.16: Respondents' views on whether MUT staff understood the MUT 2010-2020 strategic objectives

Yes	20
No	12
Unanswered	0

Table 4.16 shows that most (20) of the respondents consider that MUT staff understood the MUT 2010 to 2020 strategic objectives, whereas 12 did not agree. The results have proved that; there is reasonable number of respondents who understand the 2010-2020 strategy; this also correlates with results of question 13. If the majority of staff understand the strategy, there are great chances of achieving this strategy.

Table 4.17: Respondents' rating of the applicability of strategic priorities (multiple choice - respondents could choose more than one)

Attract, develop, and retain quality people	19
Efficiency, effectiveness, and growth of academic programmes	15
Quality teaching and learning	16
Quality student experience	14
Quality applied research	10
Community engagement	18
Quality management	10
Quality infrastructure	10
Quality resources development	9
Quality innovation, technology	13

development and transfer	
I do not know which one is relevant to me	1

Table 4.17 shows that most (19) of the respondents believe that the MUT strategic priority most applicable to them was: Attract, develop, and retain quality staff. This was followed by 18 respondents who agreed that community engagement was the most important; followed by quality of teaching and learning (16); efficiency, effectiveness and growth of academic programmes (15); quality student experience (14); and quality innovation, technology development, and transfer (13). There was an equal number (10) of respondents who opined that quality applied research, quality management, and quality infrastructure was very important to them. The lowest ratings were awarded to quality resource development (9), and respondents who did not know which one was relevant to them (1). These results confirmed the results of question 16, that the 2010-2020 strategy is understood by MUT employees. That has positive implications for the achievement of the strategy.

Table 4.18: Respondents' views on the extent to which they were sensitized to MUT's HR&D policies in terms of: recruitment and selection, external studies, and skills development.

Through induction	5
Through my line manager	5
Through the intranet / Internet	8
Through my colleague	6
I am not aware of these policies	8
Unanswered	0

Table 4.18 shows that most (8) respondents became aware of policies through the intranet. Similarly, (8) of the respondents stated that they were not aware of these policies. Others (5) became aware through induction and similarly, five (5) were sensitized through a line manager. I would like to put emphasis on the first option where only 5 respondents indicated that they learnt it through induction. This reflects badly on the HR&D as we need to conduct road shows new and revised policies.

Table 4.19: Respondents' views on the transformation of Mangosuthu Technikon into a University of Technology in 2003

Strategically focused	8
Academically focused	5
Learning organization	12
All of the above	13

Table 4. 19 shows that most (13) of the respondents opined that Mangosuthu Technikon transformed into a University of Technology in 2003 to be strategically focused, academically focused, and a learning organization. This was followed by 12 who thought that Mangosuthu Technikon transformed into a University of Technology in 2003 to be a learning organization, with 8 who thought that Mangosuthu Technikon transformed into a University of Technology in 2003 to be strategically focused. The smallest group (5) was of the opinion that Mangosuthu Technikon was transformed into a University of Technology in 2003 to be academically focused. It was interesting to note how differently change is perceived. These opinions are important to the development of MUT as people associate with this change, which opens more chances of learning new things.

Table 4.20: Respondents' views on noticeable changes that had been implemented since MUT adopted the new strategy for 2010-2020

Yes	22
No	10
Unanswered	0

Table 4.20 shows that most (22) of the respondents believed that there were noticeable changes since MUT adopted the new strategy for 2010-2020, whereas 10 did not think there were noticeable changes. These results are not surprising when one looks at the results of question 7, 12, 13, 14 and 16. It shows that MUT community welcome change and willing to learn; which is the purpose of workplace learning.

Table 4.21: Respondents' views on the functioning of the Human Resources and Development unit at MUT, and whether they thought that this unit had been doing things differently since the implementation of the 2010-2020 strategy

HR&D has approved policies on staff development	18
Staff development is now open to all staff members	15
Service rendered in HR&D is more efficient and effective	10
Nothing noticeable	2

Table 4.21 shows that most (18) of the respondents were of the opinion that the HR&D unit had approved policies on staff development, which is a way of doing things differently since the implementation of the 2010-2020 strategy. This was followed by the group (15) who thought that MUT's Human Resources and Development unit had been doing things differently since the implementation of the 2010-2020 strategy, as staff development was now open to all staff members. The next group (10) felt that better service was rendered by the HR&D unit, which implies that they thought it was efficient and effective. Two (2) respondents were of the opinion that MUT's Human Resources and Development unit was not doing things differently, since they stated that nothing new was noticeable. These results reflect that MUT staff is working with Skills unit in as far as skills development is concerned. However, there is still a lot that Skills unit need to do in order to satisfy the needs of the staff.

Table 4.22: Respondents' views on whether some MUT facilities had become obsolete or outdated

Lack of maintenance	4
More expensive to repair than to buy	0
Technology outdated	7
Budget deficiencies	7
Lack of operational knowledge of available	2

equipment	
Lack of succession plans	9
Lack of knowledge sharing	2
Unanswered	1

Table 4.22 shows that most (9) of the respondents thought that lack of succession planning was one of MUT’s facilities that was out-dated and therefore needed urgent attention, whereas seven (7) cited budget deficiencies as an area for urgent attention. There was an equal number (4) who thought that technology was outdated and that there was a lack of maintenance. This was followed by those who thought a lack of operational knowledge of available equipment was a problem, and an equal number who cited a lack of knowledge sharing (2). One (1) respondent left the question unanswered. Workplace learning is very dependent and encompasses the issues mentioned in this question it. Without any one of these things mentioned above there will be deficiency in workplace learning.

Table 4.23: Respondents studying in the current year

Yes	22
No	10
Unanswered	0

Table 4.23 shows that most (22) of the respondents were studying in the year the survey was done, whereas 10 was not studying. This is reflective of the MUT strategic objective to “recruit, develop, and retain quality people”. MUT is also assisting its staff with their tuition fees. Staff members who are pursuing undergraduate qualifications receive 75% of their tuition fees, whereas Masters and PhD students receive 100% towards registration and tuition. These results confirms that MUT staff like learning and development and means they associate themselves with change and high performance.

Table 4.24: Respondents’ views on the consequences of the attainment of formal qualifications (Multiple choice - respondents could choose more than one answer)

MUT achieves its strategic priority of developing staff	18
Staff performance improves	22
Knowledge sharing improves in the institution	8
The MUT reputation will improve	15

Table 4.24 shows that most (22) of the respondents felt that staff performance improved when they attained formal qualifications. This was followed by 18 who thought that the attainment of formal qualifications by staff assisted MUT to achieve its strategic priority of developing staff. Fifteen (15) respondents thought that it would improve MUT's image constituted, whereas eight (8) thought that knowledge sharing was improved in the institution when staff attained formal qualifications. The responses reported in this table covered all three objectives of the study and it is very interesting to see that MUT staff wants to improve the performance of the organisation and are passionate about their institution.

Table 4.25: Respondents' views on MUT as a learning organization (Multiple choice - respondents could chose more than one)

Workplace learning is encouraged	20
Team work is encouraged	10
Shared vision	8
Team learning	10
None of the above	8

This was a multiple choice question; respondents were at liberty to choose more than one option. Table 4.25 shows that most (20) of the respondents thought that MUT workplace encouragement helped to establish MUT as a learning organization. There was a tie of 10 who supported the idea of team work encouragement, and who thought that team learning and shared vision were priorities. Only eight (8) respondents thought that none of the reasons provided helped MUT to establish itself as a learning organization. This question was based on the principles of learning organisation and is important to check whether MUT staff is conversant with

the principles of workplace learning. The results have revealed that some staff members do not understand the principles of workplace learning.

4.4.2 Results on establishing whether performance management impacted workplace learning at MUT

Table 4.26: Respondents’ views on whether performance management had an impact on workplace learning

Agree	17
Disagree	14
Unanswered	1

Table 4.26 shows that most (17) of the respondents agreed that performance management at MUT had an impact on workplace learning, whereas 14 disagreed. One (1) respondent chose not to respond to this question. The majority felt that performance management system is needed, from performance appraisal recommendation for developed are made which means personal development plans will be submitted to Skills unit. All the training will be very much strategic thereafter as it will be emanating from the performance of each and every employee.

Table 4.27: Respondents’ views on whether the absence of a performance management system had a negative impact on workplace learning

Strongly agree	13
Agree	13
Neither agree nor disagree	1
Disagree	1
Strongly disagree	3
Not applicable	0
Unanswered	1

This was a multiple choice question. Table 4.27 shows that a similar number of respondents (13) either strongly agreed or agreed that the absence of performance management system had a negative impact on workplace learning at MUT. There was a small group (3) who strongly disagreed, and (1) of the respondents neither

agreed nor disagreed. A similar number of respondents (1) left the question unanswered. These results revealed MUT staff wants to have performance management as their workplace learning will have a direction.

Table 4.28: Respondents' views on whether change management had an impact on workplace learning

Yes	20
Uncertain	12
No	0
Unanswered	0

Table 4.28 shows that most (20) of the respondents believe that change management at MUT had an impact on workplace learning, whereas 12 did not agree. Change may not be divorced from learning, if there is change people learn new things, their perception changes, when their perception changes their attitude and behaviour will definitely change.

Table 4.29: Respondents' views on the most likely effects of the resignation of employees to join other organizations

Loss of knowledge management	6
Loss of departmental performance	19
Loss of institutional memory	6
Unanswered	1

Table 4.29 shows that most (19) of the respondents felt that the most likely effect employees who resign from MUT to join other organizations may have, may impact on departmental performance. The next strongest impact (7) would be on institutional memory, followed by knowledge management (5). One (1) respondent left the question unanswered. The respondents are more concerned with the performance; this concern is based on the premise that when one resigned he /she does not get to be replaced immediately. In the meantime his or her load has to be shared by others.

4.4.4 Results on investigating the measures MUT had in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory.

Table 4.30: Respondents’ views on the importance of sharing of knowledge with fellow colleagues to improve personal performance

Strongly agree	17
Agree	15
Neither agree nor disagree	0
Neither agree nor disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
Not applicable	0
Un answered	0

Table 4.30 shows that 17 respondents strongly agreed whilst 15 agreed that sharing of knowledge with fellow colleagues would improve personal performance. These results show that workplace learning is highly regarded. One may not achieve a lot if working in silos, synergy in performance is important. Team learning and team effort encourage good working relationships in organisation.

Table 4.31: Respondents’ views on the importance of a relationship between workplace learning and knowledge management

Strongly agree	10
Agree	16
Neither agree nor disagree	5
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0
Not applicable	0
Unanswered	1

Table 4.31 shows that most (16) of the respondents agreed that in their opinion there should be a relationship between workplace learning and knowledge

management. This was followed by 5 who strongly agreed. There was a group of 16 who agreed, whereas 1 respondent left the question unanswered. Understanding of these concept means that the learning that happens is not accidental, people understand that learning increases their knowledge base.

Table 4.32: Respondents' views on knowledge sharing

Agree	31
Disagree	1
Unanswered	0

Table 4.32 shows that a great majority (31) of the respondents agreed that they had a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing, whereas one (1) respondent disagreed that this was important. This is a very good indication in as far as workplace learning is concerned. If people are willing to share their knowledge means their thinking horizon expands and when it expands better performance is expected.

Table 4.33: Respondents' views on whether knowledge sharing occurred at MUT

Strongly agree	3
Agree	9
Neither agree nor disagree	10
Disagree	9
Strongly disagree	1
Not applicable	0
Unanswered	0

Table 4.33 shows that most (10) of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed whether knowledge sharing occurred at MUT. This implies that they were uncertain. An equal number (9) of respondents agreed and disagreed. There were three (3) respondents who strongly agreed, whereas one respondent strongly disagreed. In table 4.31 it become clear that MUT staff is willing to share knowledge, however;

they are not convinced that the sharing of knowledge occurs in this institution. This poses a challenge for MUT to make sharing of knowledge visible.

Table 5.34: Respondents’ involvement as members of communities of practices in their fields of expertise

Yes	13
No	19
Unanswered	0

Table 4.35 shows that most (19) of the respondents stated that they were not members of a community of practices in their field of expertise, whereas 13 stated that they were. Having less people in communities of practice is not good for the institution, as knowledge is the backbone of MUT business. Employees need to be encouraged to join, so that they develop and resuscitate their knowledge.

Table 4.35: Respondents’ views on aspects that were affected most when MUT became a university.

MUT structure (reporting line)	28
Technological change	8
Policies	28
Job descriptions	4
Strategy	30

Table 4.35 was a multiple choice question respondents were allowed to respond to each of the options. The results show that a high number of respondent noticed that the strategy has changed; this is followed by equal number (28) respondents noticing the change in policies. There are no significant changes noted on descriptions and technological. The strategy used by the used institution of not overwhelming the staff with change is commended, change need to be rolled out in stages so that people may learn and adapt into changing environment.

Table 4.36: Respondents' views on their immediate supervisors' awareness of their subordinate membership status in their fields of expertise

Yes	15
No	14
Unanswered	3

Table 4.36 shows that most (15) of the respondents felt that their immediate supervisors were aware of their subordinate membership status in their fields of expertise, whereas 14 did not think that way. There was a group of 3 who left the question unanswered and the assumption is made that they do not belong to any community of practice. This has a negative implication on the employees when supervisors are ignorant of their membership as time and again employees need to attend seminars, workshop and conferences. Again if membership is kept secret it means that individuals are not willing to share their knowledge.

Table 4.37: Respondents' views on what are the indicators for MUT becoming a learning organisation

Sensitive towards staff training needs	16
Structure allows growth	9
Synergy in activities	7

The purpose of workplace learning is to see organisations becoming learning organisations. Table 4.37 indicates that the majority of respondents regard the development of staff as the key indicator for becoming a learning organisation, whereas (9) respondents feel that the structure of the organisation has influence on the development of workplace learning. Synergy in activities is regarded is the less priority. In actual fact learning organisations incorporate all these factors. MUT need to need to develop its employees to apprehend each importance of these indicators.

Table 4.38: Respondents' views on having open information sessions (symposiums) at MUT for staff members to share knowledge

Agree	32
Disagree	0
Unanswered	0

Table 4.37 shows that all the respondents felt that there is a high need for knowledge sharing session, if knowledge is not used and renewed it quickly becomes obsolete. MUT as the institution that breeds knowledge should be leading in knowledge sharing and knowledge management and in open information sharing sessions.

Question 38: Open-ended responses .

The respondents were given an opportunity to openly write what they thought about MUT workplace learning. Their concerns, expectations, and suggestions were expected in this kind of the question.

Of the 25 respondents, only 11 wrote comments on workplace learning at MUT. Themes were used to analysis comments as it pertained to the responses, being mainly knowledge management, support by management and performance management.

- Knowledge management and knowledge sharing came out as the main concern they have, and this is related to objective three of the study which is; ‘To investigate what measures MUT has in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory’. Respondents felt that MUT is not strong in knowledge management for instance new employees and newly promoted employees are not always inducted. This result or concern correlates with the concern raised in the focus group as well as with the results of question 25,34 and 37 where results revealed that knowledge sharing is important to MUT staff. This is interesting since one of the principles of learning organisations is shared vision.
- Lack of Support; was also a concern, and this is relates to objective of one the study one that is; ‘To investigate what measures MUT had in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory’. Respondents felt that the non-academic staff are less recognised in the institution, when it come to development and retaining of staff. This concern emanates from the promotion policy that caters for academic staff only. The focus group participants also

shared similar sentiments, this reflects as if the institution see non-academic as less important. If this is the feeling among non-academic staff, it definitely hampers progress in the development of workplace learning. MUT has to do something about this as it cannot afford to have disgruntled employees. Workplace learning and policies need not to be seen as discriminatory but to be strategic.

- The results have indicated that MUT employees are ready to have a performance management system. The lack of performance management system is seen as having a negative impact on the performance of the institution as well as on the workplace learning. This has become clear in the results of question 26, 27 and the focus group respectively.

4.6 Responses from the focus group

The questions posed to the focus group were based on the three objectives of the study. (Appendix A transcript)

Objective 1: To investigate the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed.

Participants showed different views on this objective, however most points raised were more of suggestions and advice which they thought might assist the institution to achieve its goal of strategic workplace learning. The following were:

- Each department should have its own operational objective, which will firstly assist all staff to understand the strategic priority relevant to them. Secondly, this will improve workplace learning as people will be implementing change and learning from the changing environment together. Ultimately, this will also improve their performance in enormously; as there will be synergy in departments. Whatever the employees will be learning in the process will entice workplace learning and those lessons will be very strategic focused.
- The non-existence of training diary reflects badly on Skills unit as, and therefore HR&D was seen as not doing enough in as far as making workplace strategic training.

Objective 2: To determine whether workplace learning at MUT have an impact on performance management.

The discussion showed that MUT staff is looking forward to have a performance management system, this has been ubiquitous in the results of the questions in the survey. Participants believe that most development and non-performance will be eliminated, should the performance management be implemented. Through discussion it was apparent that performance management is highly associated with workplace learning, change management, knowledge management and performance itself.

Objective 3: To determine measures MUT have in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory.

The focus group strongly felt that the institution is not preserving its institutional memory. There has been a trend that once a person gets a higher qualification resigns from this institution, this was seen as having bad impact on the investment that MUT losses in term of return on investment on skills that is developed. The performance of the institution gets affected when people leave. MUT is being used as an incubator for other institutions.

The data obtained from the focus group have been collaboratively discussed with the outcomes of the survey. It was revealed that the focus group shared the same sentiment; i.e., that MUT is doing something about workplace learning. However, it needs to work harder to encourage high standards of workplace learning.

4.7.1 Summary of the results pertaining to Objective 1

The following discussion explores the results on how the respondents rated the level of MUT's strategically informed position regarding workplace learning.

Objective one was mainly to assess the responsiveness of the Skills Development unit to determine to what extent the unit was perceived to communicate service delivery, and the effectiveness of the tools that are used to encourage workplace learning among the staff. A second focus was to determine how management in general encouraged workplace learning in their departments.

Looking at the results drawn from the data analysis, it was revealed that MUT workplace learning is perceived to be strategically informed. When considering the results as reported in Tables 5.15, 5.11, 5.9, 5.16, 5.17, and 5.25, very positive

results of MUT workplace learning are reflected. This shows that MUT practices workplace learning and aspires to become a learning organization.

However, there are areas where the results were not positive. It is not acceptable to have people in an organization who do not understand the strategy of the organization, or at least the strategic objectives applicable to them. This may raise many questions about their performance and about their line managers.

When comparing the short answers (open-ended questions) from the questionnaire with the responses from the focus group (Appendix A), it was clear that MUT staff did not agree on whether the workplace learning at MUT was strategically focused. Some felt MUT was working towards it and others felt it did not exist. From the open-ended responses result of question 7, it became apparent that staff is commending MUT for doing well in terms of workplace learning. However, the focus group also felt that there was a lot that still needed to be done before MUT could be confidently announced as a leading workplace of learning. A concern was expressed that the offering of training was skewed as academic staff were taken better care of than non-academic staff, as was revealed in opinions 4 and 5 and in comments from the open ended-questions. The focus group suggested that the preferential treatment that academics receive need to end as all staff need to be developed, regardless of their position. However, one respondent was of the opinion that staff members need to understand what the core business of the institution is. This was a response by one member of the focus group, and did not necessarily reflect the opinion of all.

4.7.2 Summary of results pertaining to Objective 2

The results on establishing whether workplace learning at MUT had an impact on performance management are discussed below.

The results reflect that MUT staff felt that workplace learning impacted on performance management, which is why they seemed to be concerned with the absence of a performance management system, as is reflected in Table 5.27. From the responses to the short answers it was clear that respondents felt that having a performance management system in place would be positive. Respondents have a belief that such a system should assist university management in sorting out most of its challenges, including workplace learning and monitoring of the performance in the

institution. The focus group also felt strongly about the absence of a performance management system. Their main concern in this regard was that it could not be said that workplace learning was strategically focused when there were no personal development plans and performance management in place.

4.7.3 Summary of responses pertaining to Objective 3

The results on investigating the measures MUT put in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory is reported below.

It is crucial for MUT as a knowledge centre to reveal itself as a knowledge vessel as well as the champion of knowledge sharing. April. (2004:3) emphasize knowledge management in organizations and advise that "...organizations which are not yet applying knowledge management may be aware that they do not capture and re-use good or best practices, that they risk repeating the same mistakes, and that they are likely to lose what employees learn" . When correlating this with the demographic information on age, qualifications, and experience, as well as with the statistics on the MUT profile, it was revealed that there was a lower percentage of employees in the age group of fifty-five than in the age group thirty-five and younger. It could be argued that MUT is not retaining the employees that have been groomed in the institution or experienced employees and that knowledge management is therefore questionable.

MUT staff has a very positive attitude on knowledge sharing. This is evident in the results that are reflected in Tables 5.30, 5.32, and 5.37. Respondents supported this view in their comments to the open-ended questions, and the focus group concurred.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has covered the data analyses and interpretations with regards to the objectives of the study. The data that were collected were based on the literature review presented in Chapter two, which discussed the concepts that are common in workplace learning. Based the analyses that were presented and discussed in this chapter, it became evident that MUT encourages workplace learning and staff members are positive about it. However, there are areas of concern which is not

surprising as learning is a continuous journey which has no destination. The next chapter will discuss the recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at summarizing the study by presenting the main conclusions, recommendations, and possible topics for further studies.

The study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of workplace learning at Mangosuthu University of Technology.

The data analyses and interpretations of the findings have shown that MUT aspires to be a leading workplace learning organization. This is premised on the objectives of the study which were:

Objective 1

- To examine the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed;

Objective 2

- To determine whether workplace learning at MUT had an impact on performance management; and

Objective 3

- To determine what measures MUT have in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory.

Through this study it was shown that MUT as an organization encourages workplace learning and has an understanding that learning is the core source of performance and change. These ultimately build the knowledge base and institutional memory of the organization, which need to be developed and protected. It was concluded that workplace learning at MUT is deliberate, and intended to improve performance and knowledge management.

Part of the purpose of the study was to assist the Skills Development unit improve its services in as far as providing services that will encourage and sustain workplace learning at MUT are concerned.

5.2 Reflection

Reflection in practitioner research is of paramount importance as it connects theory and practice, as recommended by Averweg and Hardman (2011). In most cases theory and practice are not the same; practice is normally influenced by many factors like organizational structure, environment, economic factors, and people. In the theoretical review chapter, types of learning were discussed. It is very interesting to see how learning can be expanded and differently understood, yet at the same time all accept that learning is a process of acquiring knowledge of some sort. It is also interesting to see that learning organizations are not far distanced from workplace learning; although one needs to be careful not over credit workplace learning. This may lead to an illusion of some kind and may result in a situation where learning organization is not pursued properly. Workplace learning has been established as social, strategic, and operational learning which is meant to eventually take an organization to the level of being a learning organization. In this context where people learn together, they constructively contribute to their own development and the development of their organization. In such a structure people are exploratory; they are not intimidated to refrain from asking constructive questions, and they share constructive information (Elsevier, 2008).

The research methodology used in this study is termed practitioner research. In conducting this research I argued that this approach would assist me, as the skills development practitioner at MUT, to develop the unit in which I work in order to bring about change, to improve the performance of the unit, to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the learning context of the institution, and to encourage learning not only of the students, but also of staff members employed at the university. This research was premised on the principles of what constitute learning organization, namely: mental models, team learning, shared vision, personal mastery, and systems thinking (Senge,1990) The topics that were discussed in Chapter two - workplace learning, learning organization, information sharing, change management, human capital, communities of practices, performance management, and knowledge

management - form an integral part of workplace learning and therefore of learning organizations.

Through an in-depth study of the theoretical literature, I have come to realize what ideal workplace learning constitutes and am inspired by the vision that my efforts will eventually lead MUT to become a learning organization of repute. However, being aware of the gaps in the practices of workplace learning at MUT, I realize that MUT still faces many challenges on this journey. At the time of conducting this research I argued, based on my informed opinions and personal observations that MUT was and still in a learning curve with regards to the concept of and requirements for a workplace learning institute.

As a practitioner, I learnt a great deal by exploring the theory of workplace learning in the related literature. I humbly discovered some gaps in my own understanding of concepts, which have since been levelled.

Practitioner research allows the practitioner to have full understanding of his/her own actions and views (through action research), other people's actions and views, and the realities of the learning environment in which the research occurs (Averweg and Hardman, 2011). In attempting this research, it was clear to me that the change I envisaged could only be brought about through the transformation of MUT into a learning organization; and in this context I could see personal mastery unfolding through action research.

The change and learning that are envisaged are twofold. As a practitioner I need to keep on learning, sharing information (shared vision- MUT strategy and policies have to be my guiding lights), MUT ought to learn for it to prosper however; as a practitioner I have a duty and responsibility to influence change. To bring about change and to help establish MUT as a learning organization, I see my function as two-fold. First, as a practitioner I should never stop learning, and I should use the MUT vision and policies as my guiding lights. Secondly, I have the duty and responsibility to influence change not only within myself, but also within every staff member on campus who is serious about learning. However, as a researcher I could not pre-empt my views and attitudes; it was imperative to base the findings and recommendations of this study on a scientific research process and to arrive at unbiased conclusions about whether the gaps that I perceived did in fact exist.

The study was developmental for both the Skills Development unit and particularly the Skills Development Practitioner. According to Fox et al. (2007; 81), "Practitioner research is a strategy by which practitioners can use research to assist them to reflect in a systemic manner and learn from their practice". I have been able to look at my own work and the role I play in making workplace learning effective at MUT. Price (2004, as cited by Averweg and Hardman, 2011:376) further emphasizes the impact practitioner research has on the practitioner. This author states that the purpose of practitioner research is as follows: "To understand oneself, one's motives, perception, attitudes, values, and feelings. Practitioners understand the different perceptions of others". I have learnt to question my own practices, to acknowledge my weaknesses and strengths, and to embrace my challenges. I am working on a strategy to improve my practice which I believe will have a positive impact on workplace learning at MUT.

Practitioner research compels one to be engaged in on-going research. In this process many improvements have been made through addressing the challenges and learning from the achieved successes. The literature review has renewed my understanding of concepts and has assisted me to understand how terminology and trends keep on changing. This sums up all the experience I have gained through this project, and it has facilitated my understanding and knowledge of what workplace learning constitutes in general and within specific contexts.

The challenges of this project were mainly in the process of data collection, as was mentioned in Chapter four. However, it has enriched my knowledge of workplace learning and of understanding what it means to work with people.

The conclusions and recommendations will be discussed as they pertain to the objectives of the study.

5.2.1 Objective 1: To examine the extent to which MUT's workplace learning is strategically informed.

Although the results revealed that respondents perceived MUT workplace learning to be strategically informed, many concerns were also expressed.

Based on the survey as well as on observations made during group discussions, it was revealed that interaction occurs between relevant staff members. In this regard it may be concluded that MUT has shown itself to be willing to encourage workplace learning. Moreover, it was clear that, despite all the challenges, MUT staff members are taking workplace learning seriously. Given the fact that MUT has recently been converted into a university and that it is still finding its feet and learning to adapt to a new landscape, it will be unreasonable to compare it with other traditional universities. For example, despite the enthusiasm among staff members, limited resources appear to be a drawback.

The study further revealed that elements of a learning organization are visible in the institution, although they are not prominent. Learning is a journey; therefore MUT is on a journey of becoming a leading workplace learning centre. In Chapter two of this study, strategy was one of the points discussed under learning organization. The lack of a skills development strategy which was highlighted by the study reveals that MUT still has a long way to go if it wants to become a reputable learning organization. Cognisance must be taken of the fact that the lack of such a strategy will make it increasingly impossible for the institution to set realistic and achievable targets.

It is therefore recommended that a skills development strategy be formulated which should guide, control, monitor, and measure the progress the institution is making in so far as workplace learning is concerned.

Through observation and secondary data collection (record analysis), the study further revealed that MUT is not compliant with its own internal policies. Policies can either be inhibiting or enabling factors in an organization, depending on which side the observer stands. However, they need to be adhered to in order to ensure the smooth running of the institution. One of the concerns raised by the study is the approval processes which guide staff training and which mainly resides with HR&D. My recommendation is therefore that the Skills Development unit needs to adhere to the policies that are in place; for instance, the policy on staff development stipulates that the Skills Development Committee should be actively involved in matters of skills development. Decisions pertaining to staff development need to be made by this committee. The situation at this point in time is that the Skills Development

Committee is not utilized to the maximum as the HR&D unit seems to have unnecessary power of dictating who goes on which training programme. The Skills Development Committee should be meeting at least six times per annum; yet, due to some challenges beyond their control, it has held only two meetings in the year the study was conducted.

The findings have revealed that some MUT staff members are not fully acquainted with strategic information contained in policies. Being ignorant of such information may lead to contravening the policies and thereby not aligning operations to the strategic objectives of the organization. It is therefore recommended that the HR&D unit conducts “road shows” and induction programmes in order to make staff aware of relevant policies and other strategic information.

5.2.2 Objective 2: To determine whether workplace learning at MUT impacted performance management.

According to April (2004:25), “...learning cannot be separated from performing. It is a process that goes beyond time of entry into an organization or prescribed training sessions”. Performing (or performance) is the direct result of both formal and informal learning, whether at an organizational or social level. If MUT wishes to maximize the learning and performance of its people, workplace learning needs to be strategically informed. The lack of a performance management system has an adverse impact on strategic workplace learning. At MUT, nothing seems to inform the training that is being conducted as there are no Personal Development Plans (PDPs) that premise skills programmes and short courses that are conducted. In terms of training programmes, staff members usually submit what they wish / want to do and not necessarily what is required of them to perform their duties effectively. For instance, it was observed that approximately forty percent of training requests submitted for approval was for courses offered outside KZN; yet no efforts were made by the applicants to find local training services despite the requirement that they had to submit three quotations. It is understandable that frustration results on the applicants’ side when their applications are turned down, but there are deeper issues that need to be explored. The study revealed that staff members get discouraged when their training needs, particularly when they wish to travel outside the province, are not attended to, and the situation gives cause for concern when

staff members verbalize negative perceptions about the quality of training they may be exposed to. This observation should not be seen as a reflection on the quality of training offered in other provinces, but rather as a reflection on the attitude of staff towards local training opportunities. The Skills Development unit faces the responsibility of educating staff which includes considering the factors for training intervention approval. It has been observed that some colleagues use training courses as an excuse for travelling opportunities. Moreover, if staff members go on irrelevant “training courses” simply because they are offered the opportunity to travel, it could have a number of negative consequences for workplace learning. Firstly, the content of the training programme may not be relevant if it is outside the field of reference of the institution or the specific trainee. Secondly, it may not have any impact on the performance of the individual; and lastly, the budget will be exhausted in a very short space of time by a small number of staff members while the training needs of other staff members are not covered.

My urgent recommendation is that MUT should speed up the process of implementing a performance management system so that staff training will be informed by Personal Development Plans (PDPs) of the staff. This will make workplace learning effective since PDPs are linked to the Key Performance Areas of each individual, which are ultimately informed by the strategic goals of the institution. With regards to correlating the Return on Investment principle at this point with PDPs, it was evident that MUT had not been given attention to this at the time of the study, as no discernible measures of monitoring and evaluating training could be traced. Part of the purpose of learning is to bring about positive change; this change will mean better support given to the academic departments to ensure quality teaching and learning of students. This will ultimately result in high pass rates of students and more grants from the Department of Higher Education. Therefore, it is highly recommended that a performance management system be put in place at the earliest possible time.

Another recommendation is that the Skills Development unit should develop a data base of local training providers that they may make use of. However, this does not necessarily mean that training should be confined to KZN for scarce skills; people should still be allowed to attend relevant training programmes outside the province.

But it is always better to conduct in-house training since a larger group of people will benefit while dipping into a minimum budget.

5.2.3 Objective 3: To determine measures MUT have in place to retain knowledge management and institutional memory

Parts of learning organization principles are a shared vision and team learning. Through a review of the literature, observation, and data collection, the study has shown that people are keen to share knowledge. People learn from others, both through formal and informal interventions. For instance, during the strike action in June 2011, I observed that people were interacting by talking about things that affected their performance and the performance of the institution, and by talking about how the institution had developed. Participating in those groups were both new and experienced employees; it was a kind of institutionalization process. The point is that staff members demonstrated a willingness to create and share institutional memory.

It is therefore recommended that social events be organized where people will get to talk about things that affect them and where they can come up with solutions thereafter. April et al. (2004:3) warn that "...organizations which are not yet applying knowledge management may be aware that they do not capture and reuse good or best practices, that they risk repeating the same mistakes, [and] that they are likely to lose what employees learn." Evans (2003:17) advises organizations to enhance knowledge by "...having structures, systems, and processes in place that encourage and facilitate the creation of knowledge and its transfer". The starting point should be to organize internal symposia, breakfast / lunch talks, and debates, which will further encourage staff members to join communities of practices groups.

Through observation and investigation, the study revealed that some staff members who had attended training did not share what they had learnt with others in their departments. Moreover, they did not submit reports to the Skills Development unit despite the fact that this is a requirement.

A recommendation in this regard is that a training evaluation system be designed to track people who do not submit reports subsequent to training sessions. Such a system will serve a twofold purpose: firstly, it will serve as a mechanism of control in

terms of return on investments, change of behaviour, or performance of employees. Secondly, it will serve as quality assurance control so that the Skills Development unit may know which service providers offer good quality programmes that the institution may continue using.

In the focus group discussion it was noted with concern that MUT had a plan in place to retain its academic staff, but that no such plan was in place to retain non-academic staff. Academic staff members are eligible to apply for promotion if they get a certain qualification (Masters and PhD); this is in accordance with the policy of academic promotion. On the other hand, there are no measures in place to retain non-academics. Moreover, the once-off payment when one has gained a new qualification seems to be insufficient.

It is recommended that MUT review its promotion policy. For instance, it has been observed that there are secretaries who have a Masters Degree qualification. This means those people are underutilized, more especially as their studies have been paid for by the institution.

Lastly; MUT as a developing institution has a potential of embracing workplace learning if it could take into consideration what has been mostly discussed in chapter two; theoretical review. MUT needs to create its basis for workplace learning in order to instigate meaningful dialogue, heighten performance, bring meaningful and productive change, share information, gain trust of its employees and its stakeholders, improve the image of the institution, create organizational culture and organisational memory that will sustain the institution.

5.3 Further research

The learning that takes place in an organization is profit orientated and mainly favours the needs of the employer; hence all learning has to be strategically informed. The questions can be posed:

- To what extent does workplace learning develop the individual?
- Are employees able to utilize the knowledge they gained through workplace learning when they are no longer employable?
- How can employees contribute meaningfully to the economy of the country, as this is the intention of the Skills Development Act?

Future research on workplace learning where the focus is on critical systems thinking as a research framework, and where critical awareness, social awareness, human well-being, and emancipation policies are addressed is therefore imperative.

5.4 Conclusion

The study has revealed that workplace learning is primarily based on performance management, change management, and knowledge management. These processes do not happen in isolation; they are interdependent. Learning organization may not be realized unless these management realities are taken into consideration. It was therefore heartening to see that Mangosuthu University of Technology and its employees are keen to learn, and that workplace learning is generally taken seriously at this developing institution. I would like to reiterate the point that workplace learning is a journey to which there is not a definite destination. This journey is for both the institution and the Skills Development practitioner. From the perspective of practitioner research, the study afforded me the opportunity and scope to note the key roles of the skills practitioner. Such a person needs to be creative, versatile, a change agent, a researcher, a good negotiator, and in possession of both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Without these characteristics the skills practitioner will find it difficult to produce pleasing results, and taking his/her organization to higher levels in terms of staff development may be a severe challenge.

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