

PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES ON THE
WORKPLACE SKILLS PLAN AS AN INSTRUMENT
FOR PROMOTING WORKPLACE LEARNING

By

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I **THABILE NOKUTHULA MTOMBENI** hereby declare that the work that I present in this thesis under the supervision of Dr. S. Kaye is based on my own original work that is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree Master in Education, Adult Education in the School of Adult & higher Education University of KwaZulu Natal. All sources that have been used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged accordingly.

Signed



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ABSTRACT

University of KwaZulu-Natal

PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES ON THE WSP AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PROMOTING WORKPLACE LEARNING

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In South Africa, changes to the political landscape have highlighted the glaring differences in the previous government's policies in the provision of worker education and training for a highly skilled workforce throughout the different sectors. This situation invoked the need for changes to the skills development policies for improving the skills profile in the country. Through the introduction of the National Skills Development Strategy along with other supportive legislation and policies that serve as vehicles for redress and transformation of skills development and training in the workplace, workplace learning has become critical for attainment of national goals for a highly skilled workforce. Workplace learning discourse necessitates a multidisciplinary approach to understanding adult learning in the workplace. This study aims at establishing the perceptions held by employees from the eThekweni municipality on the use of the WSP as an instrument for promoting workplace learning. Comprehension of the usage of the WSP as a means of addressing the national skills development agenda is important in organisations concerned with the role played by their human resources for the success and sustainability of the organisations in the market as local and global players.

ABBREVIATIONS

EEA	Employment Equity Act
LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education Training Authority
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
ITB	Industry Training Board
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NTB	National Training Body
SDA	Skills Development Act
SDL	Skills Development Levy
SDF	Skills development Facilitator
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
WSP	WSP

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Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the disbandment of the former political regime in South Africa, the country and its citizens have experienced rapid transformation and many challenges in the different spheres of life that place demands for swift learning and adjustment to change. The advent of globalisation has also necessitated change in policies that form the structure for economic and social development and productivity in the country. The increased global economic participation of South Africa provided impetus for a concerted effort by the government on formulating legislation that will accelerate and improve the labour force in the country through skills development, thus ensuring sustainable competitiveness in the markets. Government's current priorities regarding skills development focuses on implementing policies that accelerate the growth and quality of skills in the workforce of the private and the public sectors for the purpose of attaining a high skills economy and high performance organisations.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY

Historically, during the apartheid era, the provision of education, training and skills development in South Africa was highly fragmented and uncoordinated. The apartheid government, through legislation, ensured separate development for its citizens based on racial segregation and discrimination. The lack of a single education department, race and gender inequality, inadequate and inappropriate training systems, skills shortages and income inequalities were due mainly to the very divisive educational provisioning and qualification structures that existed (Kraak 2004).

A key developmental prelude to changes in the training of the workforce occurred in 1981, when according to van Dyke, Nel, van Loedolff, and Haasbroek (2002) along with Ziderman and Van Adams (2000), the Manpower Training Act recommended de-racialising training by establishing the National Training Board (NTB) to oversee training matters in industry. The year 1991 saw the introduction of the Industry Training Boards (ITB's) through the amendment of the Manpower Training Act. The ITB's major responsibility centered on meeting all workers training needs in the different industries regardless of their racial orientation. Twenty-seven ITB's from the different industries, with voluntary membership, were established. Their main functions were to set training standards especially in artisan training and to disburse training levies. The ITB had faced many operational challenges, and as a system, had many weaknesses, key were in having limited coverage of the workforce and flexibility across sectors.

As part of the ongoing discussions on restructuring the future of the country, in 1992, a representative Task Team comprising of members from different stakeholders, including unions, the then government, providers of education and training, the ANC education department, and the democratic alliances was established. The main objectives for the task team involved organising and synchronising training and development issues in the industrial sector (van Dyke *et al* 2002, Ziderman and Van Adams 2000).

The discussions that ensued up to the late 90's produced various essential legislative papers and policy changes, not only to the political landscape, but also to issues pertaining to the Education, Training and Development sector. The advent of democracy called for a complete overhaul of the human resource development and management strategies of the workforce practiced by the previous government and that had contributed to the decline of skills in the country. A new system that was remedial and innovative was required. It was to serve as an intermediary between government and the private sector, with a total focus on improving training, education and skills development for the workforce of the country, tasked with "providing the necessary coordination, financial incentives and social obligation to

invest in training” (Kraak 2004:p117). The objectives of this exercise became the intensified and collective effort for the development of a highly skilled labour force for the country as an emerging global player.

1.3 THE NATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A new system aimed at facilitating redress and transformation by improving the skills profile through the context of a single national regulatory framework for skills training and development was established through the National Skills Authority (NSA) (Kraak 2004, van Dyke *et al* 2002). The main challenges facing government entail an ongoing effort to provide industries with a skilled and flexible labour force while ensuring equitable access to training and educational opportunities for all its citizens.

As part of the national human resources management strategy, the National Skills Authority (NSA) was established in 1999 in terms of the Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998. This body replaced the previous NTB that oversaw training in the different industrial sectors. The NSA collaborated with the Department of Labour (DoL) to create the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) in 2001, which defined the national skills development priorities and policies for the workforce in the country. All workplace skills development legislation has as its general purpose the ambition of increasing the overall skills in the country, curbing ineffective training provision by different training providers, increasing access and improving the quality of education and training system. Subsequently, the outcome of this exercise would be the reduction of unemployment through training, meeting workplace skills shortages and enhancing social development (Bischoff & Govender 2004, Steyn 2004, and Kraak 2004, Department of Labour 2001). In the new system, the Sectoral Education Training Authority (SETA) became responsible for regulating industries and overseeing the implementation of the NSDS and related skills development legislation. The SETAs have replaced the ITBs as regulators of training and development in the respective industrial sectors.

The Minister of Labour, Mr Membathisi Mdladlana, launched the NSDS in February 2001. The NSDS is structured in such a way that it has a five-year lifespan; thereafter it is reviewed to determine its success in implementation using a variety of success indicators. Upon reviewing the initial strategy in the first cycle of implementation for the years 2001-2005, an adjustment to the objectives and success indicators for the following implementation cycle for the period of 2005-2010 was effected. This exercise resulted in the re-launching of a revised version producing the current NSDS of 2005-2010, which is considered as a more inclusive strategy addressing national, sectoral, workplace and individual needs. Its main aim is to “radically transform education and training in South Africa, to support increased competitiveness of industry and improved quality of life for all South African” (NSDS Implementation Report 2005:p1).

The current NSDS has stipulated several objectives that provide guidance as to how its goals can be accomplished by the year 2010. The objective significant to this research is the second objective, that states it aims for “the promotion and acceleration of quality training for all in the workplace” (DoL 2005). This objective is similar to one of the purposes of the SDA, which also aims to promote the workplace as a learning environment for continuous lifelong learning. The main indicator for successful implementation of this objective is through the usage of an instrument that addresses all the workers’ learning needs within an organisation called the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP). The DoL has defined success indicators as measures that monitor and assess the progress of the legislation through its implementation. Success indicators provide a clearer picture of the effectiveness of the skills training activities of workers in organisations (Badroodien 2004, Department of Labour 2005). Therefore, the WSP as a developmental tool plays an important role in delivering the aims of the skills development policy and legislation by ensuring that all employee learning, training and developmental needs in the workplace are addressed in a manner that adheres to national policies and interests.

The vision of the NSDS emphasises the development of skills for productive citizenship for all, for “sustainable growth, development and equity” (Department of

Labour 2001). This vision describes an inclusive strategy where the individual's capabilities and potential is enabled and realized through educative interventions, so that as a citizen, the individual becomes an active participant in decision-making on issues affecting him or her, both as a member of society and as a productive worker. This vision also has connotations of empowering workers to be able to take responsibility and control of their lives. The WSP thus serves as a powerful enabling tool for cultivating and fostering worker development by recognising and encouraging learning opportunities in the workplace.

The NSDS has adopted the concept of lifelong learning as an important underlying philosophy that provides a frame for the implementation of the skills development strategy. The current discourse on lifelong learning as a process acknowledges and values the experiences of individuals in providing opportunities for learning throughout their life. It involves the individual's ability to interact with their environment that will eventually result in learning experiences beneficial to an individual throughout his or her life (Knapper 2001). The concept of lifelong learning in the workplace encourages the development of a learning culture characterised by continuous learning by the workforce and the organisation. Continuous learning through the adoption of lifelong learning practices strengthens the skills development argument for the workforce, thus aligning itself with the vision and purposes of the NSDS. The WSP through its creation serves as a tool for conceptualising and implementing the ideologies and practice of lifelong learning policies in the workplace by providing a platform where learning opportunities are availed to all stakeholders in the workplace.

Several other legislation supportive of the NSDS, such as the Skills Development Act of 1998 (SDA), Skills Development Levies Act of 1999 (SDL) and the Employment Equity Act (EEA) were also introduced to operate collectively for promoting skills development in the workplace. The SDA seeks to “develop the skills of the South African workforce thereby increasing the quality of working life for the workers, improve productivity of the workplace, promote self employment and improve the delivery of social services” (DoL 2001). This legislation attempts to

ensure that all citizens have equal access to education and training opportunities for both the employed and unemployed. For the former, it aims to increase chances of being employable, and for the latter, to enhance skills and knowledge.

The SDL serves as a financial incentive for learning and skills provision in organisations through the payment of levies and grants for training activities undertaken, whilst the EEA ensures equitable employment procedures are practiced whenever there is deployment of labour in organisations. These legislative policies place great emphasis on the importance of the development of high-quality human resources with high skills as the driving force for economic growth in this country (Steyn 2004, Kraak 2004, McGrath 2004, and Department of Labour 2005).

The central premise for these policies, and their relevance to this research, focuses on their role in encouraging employers to promote the workplace as a learning environment. Learning opportunities to employees are provided by adopting the WSP. Employers are responsible for creating environments that encourage learning for their workers within the work setting. These learning opportunities occurring in a variety of forms, afford learning to workers in their working context thus contributing to their development as members of society, and as productive members of a particular organisation.

1.4 INTERNATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The NSDS is modelled on similar skills development strategies from countries such as Britain, New Zealand and Australia. These countries have developed their workforce skills development strategies after extensive consultation with various stakeholders from different levels of society. The main aim of these skills development strategies is to facilitate the transformation of the skills levels of adults in the workforce, thus increasing their capacity to participate effectively at work through improved productivity. Participation in skills development would subsequently also improve their probability of being employable. The strategies in all countries are founded on the notion that lifelong learning improves productivity and employability of workers (Learning and Skills Council 2002 & DEET 2003).

There are programs from other countries that focus on increasing and improving business performance and competencies by focusing on skills development, which the DoL has tried to implement in this country. The Investors in People (IiP) initiative, originally a British program, was launched and implemented in South African businesses by the DoL in 2003. This program has a concept that works in conjunction with the NSDS principles. It provides a standard for good practice in human resource development, training and development matters. Minister Mdladlana announced that the initiative served to “provide the framework for improving business performance and competition through the planned approach of setting and communicating business objectives and develop people to meet these objectives” (Mdladlana Speech 2003). This initiative serves a common purpose of promoting and improving continuous learning and development in the workplace through benchmarking and best practice policies.

1.5 PURPOSE AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY

The National Skills Development Strategy as a legislative policy attempts to encourage and regulate human resource and organisational development through the creation of learning opportunities in the workplace. The continued development of competent human resources is the reason for the implementation of workplace learning strategies such as the WSP with the intention of developing the workforce.

In the past three years, the researcher has had exposure to the field of skills development and training as a student in skills development facilitation and moderator training, to become a registered skills development facilitator (SDF). In industry, there is an assumption regarding the WSP, which seems to associate the WSP mainly with the activity of compiling the document for legislative compliance. Little focus is placed on the actual learning that occurs from and through the processes guided by the WSP. This study has provided the opportunity for exploring this assumption on the usage of this instrument in the work setting.

The chosen research site is the eThekweni municipality which is one of the four largest metropolitan cities in local government located on the eastern seaboard of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Since this is a very large organisation, one of the business clusters was selected as the research site. This municipality, as an agency of government, is one of the better organized, most progressive in approach to service delivery and best managed governmental organisations in the country. It has received recognition by being awarded a variety of accolades in this regard. As a public service organisation, it strives at being a productive city and eventually a learning city. The objectives describe the entity's commitment to learning and development of employees in the organisation by developing effective learning strategies for the attainment of these objectives. Therefore, the WSP becomes important for achieving the organisational objectives, because it informs the current and future skills profile of the workforce and provides structure for learning and development initiatives in the organisation.

Since the NSDS is in the second phase of implementation in the country, there are currently large research gaps in the area of skills development, especially focusing on the WSP and its implementation in organisations. Furthermore, there is currently no documented evidence of research conducted from the employee's perspective regarding the usefulness of the implementation of this instrument in promoting continuous learning and development in organisations. Information on how the WSP is perceived would be beneficial for strengthening organisational human resource strategy through the adoption of the NSDS. Improving employees' perception and attitudes on the value of training and learning initiatives undertaken by organisations under the WSP would have positive ramifications for adult learning in the workplace.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Various authorities on workplace learning agree that the workplace is an opportune environment for providing learning to workers for both personal and professional development (Billet 2002a, Billet 2002b Matthew 2000, and Robotham 2003). These

learning opportunities should be evident in the WSP, through the documentation of all learning and training activities scheduled for continuous skills development. Through the WSP, the identified current and future skills needs are planned accordingly by implementing relevant learning intervention to either attain new skills, retain existing skills or completely re-skill workers where necessary.

This study will focus on determining the workers' opinions and what they know about the WSP, since it is acknowledged as an instrument intended to promote and increase learning in the workplace. As part of the skills development process, is it regarded as a useful method in promoting workplace learning or not by the beneficiaries of the process, the workers.

The main objective of the study is to understand employee perceptions regarding the learning interventions identified in the WSP, as well as the nature of the learning promoted through this instrument. This information is important for improving the usage of the instrument especially since no formal researches have been conducted on perceptions from workers perspectives in this area of skills development since its implementation. Knowledge on how the workings of the WSP if further developed has the ability of contributing to policy development and improved future legislative skills development initiatives.

The researcher understands that organisations are aware of the legislation guiding skills development, but does this awareness have any influence on the learning and development of employees in the organisation? This study will not consider the implementability of the WSP in the organisation or measure the success of its implementation. It is concerned with investigating the perception of employees on the processes of learning that occur resulting from the execution of the WSP.

The primary research question is as follows:

- What are the perceptions of employees regarding the usage of the WSP in meeting their workplace learning needs for professional and personal development?

Secondary questions are:

- What is the nature of the learning encouraged through the WSP?
- Whose interest does the WSP serve in the organisation?

The research will attempt to provide understanding on the views of employees regarding the WSP in meeting their workplace learning needs, thus, encouraging continuous learning for professional and personal development. Since the implementation of the WSP, have there been changes to the learning of the workers? The answer to these questions will be obtained from the information provided by their knowledge of the WSP. Information on the nature of the learning that occurs or is encouraged is also important for understanding the role of the WSP in supporting learning in the workplace. In an ideal situation, the various forms of learning interventions should be identified and reflected in the WSP, thus indicating the different kinds of learning that occurs through the various programs that are implemented.

Lastly, information on whose interest the WSP serves in the organisation is also integral to proper usage of this instrument for promoting workplaces as learning environments. In organisations, the influence of the different decision-makers on selecting who is afforded learning opportunities, serves to provide information about power dynamics that impact on the decisions on learning in the workplace. It would prove interesting to determine whether the WSP is completed simply for the purposes of meeting the legislative requirements and deadlines for submission to government, thus being able to claim the skills training grant, or if there are real concerns for skills development in the organisation.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2. This chapter contains the definitions of the concepts and terms found throughout the discussions, for understanding their usage in the research.

Chapter 3. The chapter discusses the theoretical framework and current discursive debate contributing to the formulation of the workplace learning theory. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the concept of learning in the workplace, it dictates the inclusion in the discussion aspects of adult learning theory, human capital theory and current organisational learning and development influences to workplace learning theory.

Chapter 4. This chapter focuses on the research design and methodology used in the study. The research adopted the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm using the qualitative research design approach in the form of a case study, to explain the manner of meaning and knowledge creation by workers experiences on the use of the WSP in their organisation. Data gathered from the chosen sample was through semi-structured interviews and document reviews. These were analysed, interpreted and conclusion drawn using qualitative data analysis procedures.

Chapter 5. This chapter reports the findings from the collected data. The themes that emerged from the data provide the structure of the presentation of the findings in a descriptive and narrative form. The nature of the data allows for the voice of the respondents to come through, thus providing understanding of their reality.

Chapter 6. This chapter contains the discussion and interpretation of the linkage between the findings and the theoretical framework and formulates debates relating to the reviewed literature in Chapter 3. There are recommendations included based on the suggestions received from respondents and the literature on how to improve workplace learning and specifically using the WSP in the organisation.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Workplace learning for skills development is a relatively emerging field of study that requires the understanding of how the work setting, through its systems, processes and procedures, is able to provide learning opportunities for the development of workers, especially in South Africa. The various activities occurring in the workplace under the guise of learning, training or skills development, all have the aim of improving the capacity of the worker as a productive employee in the organisation. The philosophy of lifelong learning and the notion of workplaces as learning environments would be strengthened if the perceptions and attitudes about the usefulness of the WSP were positively embraced by all in the organisation.

There is a tremendous task ahead filled with many challenges for achieving the national objectives of skills development for all concerned stakeholders.

DEFINITION OF TERMS AND KEY CONCEPTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of workplace learning is influenced by the different disciplines that shape the discussion on issues of learning and training in the work setting. Defining the terms and concepts used in this study will assist in understanding the usage of these concepts in the discussions that follow throughout the research document.

2.2 LEARNING

Learning is a contested concept between various theorists and disciplines concerned with education and human development. There is a general agreement of defining learning as product and process. The former is depicted through the acquisition of knowledge and skills as the attainment of *the know-how*, which is the operational and functional aspect of knowing. The latter, *the know-what* refers to the conceptual and cognitive aspect of knowing which results in meaningful changes in the individual (Gravett 2005, Kim 2004, Illeris 2003, Robotham 2003, Garavan 1997b). Learning is defined by Mezirow (1998:p6) as

“the process of using prior interpretations to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action.”

This definition is most appropriate for use in this study because it focuses on how an experience and eventual outcome of particular behaviour or action serves as a resource for influencing future action. Therefore, learning occurs after an experience that requires some form of action denoting changes in behaviour and attitude due to understanding ascribed to that experience.

2.3 LIFELONG LEARNING

The definition of lifelong learning considers all the learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence within the civic, social and employment related perspective. The United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as part of educational reform conceptualised lifelong learning as a system for developing a learning philosophy throughout an individual's life. This concept is based on four pillars of education throughout life referred to as: *learning to be, learning to do learning to live together and learning to know* (UNESCO 2006). This concept values all forms of learning that promotes the development of skills, knowledge, interests and competencies required for living in the modern society and facilitates the active participation and meaningful contribution of individuals as employees in their workplaces and as members of society (Knapper 2001). It involves the individual's ability to interact with their environment to levels that eventually result in learning experiences beneficial to them throughout their whole lives.

Another definition offered by Longworth (2001:592), regards lifelong learning as a

... continuous process which stimulates and empowers the individual to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetime and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments.

His definition translates the concept into a practice established through a series of actions that make it applicable and sustainable throughout an individual's life, resulting in some form of growth or development of the individual. Workplaces, as sites for affording learning opportunities of various forms to employees, potentially promote the lifelong learning principles for individuals at work.

2.4 THE WORKPLACE

Defining the workplace has become very problematic due to various changes in our lifestyles that have contributed to changes in the nature of work and its location. It is thus important to define the workplace in the setting relevant for this study.

Matthew (1999:p19) defines the workplace as the “physical location, shared meanings, ideas, behaviours and attitudes which determine the working environment and relationships”. This definition is more relevant for adoption by this study. It clearly points out that the workplace is more than just the physical location where people congregate to carry out their job functions, but it is also a place where there is a mutual understanding, a common purpose guided by objectives to achieve certain organisational goals of production and service. Therefore, the learning that occurs in this environment has as its driving force the aims of improving performance and output for the common good of the organisation.

Organisations that view the workplace as a site for learning, or as an environment where learning and working intertwine, tend to have a clearly defined learning culture. An established learning culture implies that the workplace is structured such that it invokes and encourages learning processes in all activities. The learning culture encourages a learning climate where the environment fosters different forms of learning, such as informal learning, working within teams, problem solving, social interaction with colleagues and clients, all deemed as important instances where learning occurs in an organisation (Matthews 1999, Cadwell 2000, Lee et al 2004, Joopey 2004).

However, Rainbird (2000) argues that although the workplace serves as an opportune environment for different forms of learning it also faces several challenges. The main challenge that she highlights is one brought about by changes in policies reshaping workplace training and learning in countries wanting to increase productivity and remain globally competitive. These changes in policy result in the increased marketisation and privatization of training provision. In this instance, the workplace serves more than just a site for learning, but also provides a site where different interest and agendas are promoted by influential bodies in the workplace that affect the organisation’s learning and development activities. This issue of the political nature of the workplace as a learning environment is elaborated on in Chapter 3.

The introduction of the NSDS has resulted in policy changes geared to produce transformation to workplace learning and training processes and procedures. The WSP as a tool for informing and thus transforming practice may be influenced by how the organisation has defined its workplace and learning culture. Therefore, the organisation's definition of its workplace is essential to the forms of learning encouraged and supported by the organisation and the success of the different learning initiatives identified and implemented through the WSP.

2.5 THE WORKPLACE SKILLS PLAN

The Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) is an instrument that collates the learning or training and development needs of employees in any given organisation employing more than 50 workers. It serves as a statement on the current employment profile relating to present skills and future skills requirements in the organisation necessary for achieving the growth aligned with the organisation's development strategy. This growth is through improved work performance and increased productivity through the various skills development initiatives documented in the WSP. The WSP's primary function is to describe how learning and development objectives for employees in the different occupational categories are attained by the organisation in a specified period of time (Department of Labour 2003). The data on the WSP includes information on the distribution of personnel within the various occupations in the organisation, current skills gap and training needs, strategic objectives and priorities of the organisation that impact on training, demographic profile in the organisation as well as employment equity targets. Organisations and businesses are required by legislation to submit completed WSPs to the Department of Labour by June 30 of each year.

2.6 TRAINING

In most workplaces, the form of learning that is work-related and occurs within the working environment is referred to as training. Explanations of what training entails are offered by Garavan (1997b), who asserts that training refers to the systematic and concerted effort made to change or develop knowledge, skills and attitudes through

learning experiences and practice, in order to achieve effective performance in an activity or a range of activities. Whereas Gravett (2005; pviii) defines training as “the systematic development of skill patterns required by an individual to reach particular level of competency or operative efficiency to perform adequately a specific often vocational task”.

It is evident in both definitions that training involves a process of planned, structured episodes of learning where there are precise activities that have expected outcomes and certain set standards to measure successful attainment of a particular skill. The outcomes of training are evidenced and measured through the individual’s ability to execute competently the task for which the skills are attained. Therefore, since training focuses on tasks performance and the attainment of results, it is important that whatever activities or interventions are implemented to improve performance and productivity in the organisation must be aligned with strategic organisational goals and objectives (van Dyk *et al* 2002).

2.7 WORKPLACE LEARNING

There is consensus among workplace learning specialists that there is no single definition of workplace learning, the various definitions are dependent on the professional discipline of the theorist who is interested in the subject (Lee *et al* 2004, Fenwick 2001, Matthews 1999, Spencer 2002). A key feature that is common for defining workplace learning refers to all those learning opportunities that are physically located and offered internally, as well as those learning opportunities organized in a workplace context, which may encourage and support participation in courses provided externally of the workplace (Cadwell 2000, Unwin & Fuller 2003).

A broader definition of workplace learning is proposed by the Australian National Training Authority (National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2003:p2), which defines workplace learning as “learning or training that is undertaken in the workplace on the job, including on the job training under normal operational conditions, and onsite training which is conducted away from the work process”. This definition encompasses all activities resulting in learning that is work-related

which can be on and off site. These learning activities provide workers with skills that lead to their improved capacity to innovate, thus improving performance and competitiveness.

Bates, Hunt and Hillage (2005), citing the definition of workplace learning from NIACE (1999), state that workplace learning derives its purpose from the context of employment. It addresses the needs and interests of a variety of stakeholders including employers, government and employees for meeting their personal and career development needs. They attempt to make a distinction between workplace learning and learning via the workplace by formulating their own definition, where learning via the workplace includes learning activities promoted through the workplace, whilst workplace learning refers to non-vocational learning activities that are promoted in the workplace. Therefore, the key issues important for workplace learning in organisations considers the learning context, reasons for learning, the processes and outcomes of learning that contribute to the sustained development of both the individual employee and the organisation. It is also significant to acknowledge that, although workplaces provide learning opportunities, there exist certain workplace norms and practices also influencing individual participation in, and learning through, work. This influence can also be “promoting particular interest and affiliations of groups or individuals within the workplace” (Billet 2002a:p29).

The current usage of the concept of learning in the workplace is a result of a change in focus from training discourse to a learning discourse or competency development theory and workplace learning theory (Illeris 2003). An attempt to distinguish between the usage of the terms training and learning centres on the idea that the former refers to skill acquisition prescribed and motivated externally to enable the worker to improve job performance and know how, thus making the focus of training to be outcome based. Learning, on the other hand, is considered as a process and activity that is an individual’s responsibility, where differing experiences present varied opportunities for developmental change. Change is the outcome of effective learning (Knapper 2001). Learning therefore occurs when there are demonstrable changes that are associated with understanding, which is manifested

through changes in behaviour, attitude, knowledge and skills of the individual. It is a process that 'enhances the individuals' ability to build capability to create new knowledge, understanding and solutions (van Dyk *et al* 2002).

In the workplace, the terms training, development and learning are sometimes used interchangeably, although most practitioners concerned with employee development in the workplace still prefer to use the term training. Garavan (1997b) attempts to explain that training, development and education are complementary components of the process concerned with learning for the sake of enhancing human potential especially in the workplace. What may differ in these terms would be the area of emphasis in the learning context, whether it is cognitive, instrumental or affective. According to Marsick and Watkins (1990) learning is the outcome of the delivery systems of education and training that explains how individuals assign meanings in their personal and organisational lives through acquiring, interpreting, reorganizing, changing and assimilating information, skills and feelings. This definition of learning provides a clearer indication of the various aspects and processes that occur in the individual that change through experience and therefore result in learning.

For the purposes of this study, workplace learning encompasses all those activities that workers engage in at the workplace, whether through formal or informal processes resulting in their demonstrably improved capabilities, skills and knowledge. This definition is most relevant to this study because it forms the basis of what is investigated through the usage of the WSP. The workplace as a learning environment has the capacity to afford workers learning opportunities that they would not necessarily have been exposed to outside the workplace. In order for effective workplace learning to occur, great value should be placed on employee perceptions towards learning. The organisation itself should also be in a position of being supportive and receptive to the changes that learning creates. The WSP serves to provide clear mapping of the learning to be undertaken through its various programs. This study will attempt to gather data on these perceptions with the aim of determining the effectiveness of the current strategy of using the WSP.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The concept of learning encompasses various forms of learning occurring in different ways in the individual's life. The workplace serves as one environment that provides learning opportunities to individuals. This learning can assume a variety of forms dependent on the context in which it occurs. A clear distinction between the practices of learning and training in the workplace is not easily explainable. For the purposes of this study, the two words will be used interchangeably but not synonymously in the discussions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

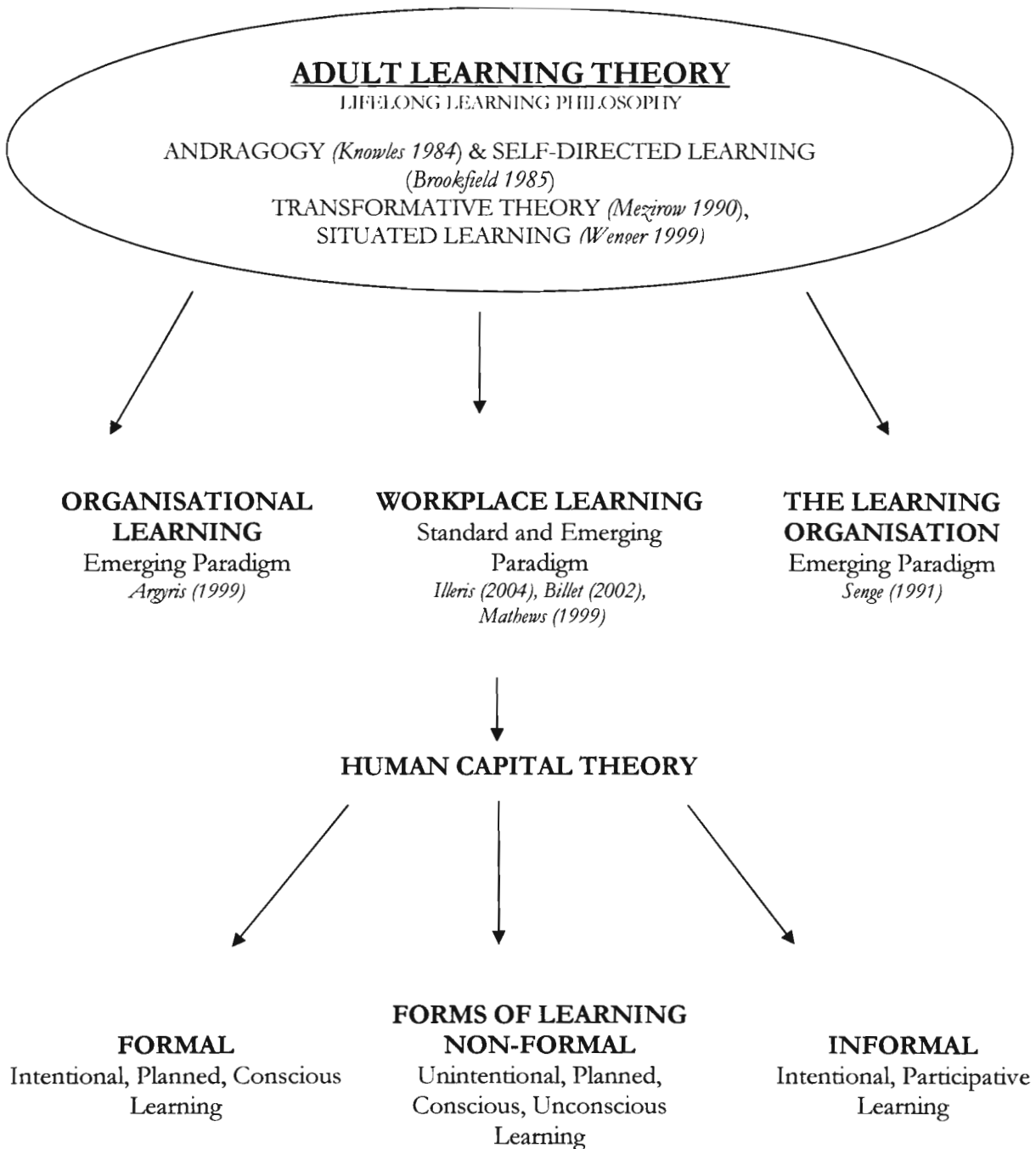
The theoretical orientation of workplace learning discourse has influences from an assortment of theories in disciplines such as adult education, organisational development, management, psychology and human resource development. The review of the literature begins with a discussion on adult learning theory that provides the frame for engaging the notion of workplace learning. The focus is on the notion of learning as a process of reflection, participation and construction, which is receiving more attention in current adult learning discourse, especially the discourse that focuses on learning in the workplace.

Workplace learning theory attempts to describe and explain how workers as adults learn in the work setting, what influences the learning, as well as the nature of the learning that occurs. Current debate, in an attempt to formulate a theory, is based on definitional and conceptual challenges of what constitutes learning, adult learning and learning in the workplace, along with how these relate with each other. Authors acknowledge the various forms of learning that occur in the workplace, which are dependent on a numerous of factors such as organisational learning culture, vision, employee developmental policies and overall attitudes to learning in the workplace.

In the South African context, the formulation and applicability of workplace learning theory as explaining the processes and practice of adult learning in the workplace, is still in its infancy. The current attention in the field of educational development and growth of the worker in the workplace highlights the interest in training and development issues that define the learning occurring at, through, or in work as an outcome or product. Although workplace learning is a broad topic, the literature will attempt to show how the current debate on workplace learning discourse is greatly

influenced by the different theorists' stances, their theoretical background and disciplinary orientation to understanding learning in the work setting. The theories chosen for the discussion present the different ways that adults learn, referred to in Figure 1. The WSP in its present form is intended to facilitate this learning in the work setting; therefore, the theoretical framework depicts the possible benefits to adults when it is implemented as intended.

Figure 1 Diagrammatic Presentation Of Theoretical Framework



3.2 ADULT LEARNING THEORY

Learning is a human process that is part of living. It is through learning that the individual gets to know his or her environment and is able to ascribe meaning to his or her world in a particular manner that makes sense to him or her, resulting in direct subsequent action (Kerka 1998, Mezirow 1990). Throughout an individual's life, the different experiences encountered at different stages of the lifecycle provide learning opportunities that produce various forms of learning. Brookfield (1986) attests to the continuous nature of adult learning by citing Smith (1982), who describes the characteristics of the nature of adult learning as a lifelong process that is personal, involves change, is partially a function of human development that pertains to experience, and it is partially intuitive.

There is continuous debate among theorists about the contested nature of the definition of learning as a term, concept, process and practice, but there exists a more favourable and common understanding amongst them that considers learning as an individual experience as well as a social process. As an individual process, the learner constructs meaning of how he or she personally experiences the world, whereas, as a social process, the assigning of meaning and understanding of experiences occurs through interacting with others in a variety of social network and structures (Hager 2004, Illeris 2004a, Illeris 2004b, and McManus 2006). The meaning-making process is described as that which the individual experiences involving the "cognitive categories that make up one's view of reality upon which actions are defined". (Krauss 2005:p762) Each experience becomes a learning opportunity when the learner is able to apply oneself by drawing on various resources gained from prior experiences in the form of beliefs, values and knowledge to formulate meaning and make sense to what they have engaged in. This ability of learners to create, validate and reconstruct the meaning of their experiences denotes a constructivist perspective to learning.

Although there are different forms of constructivism that place emphasis on differing contexts like social, radical, emancipatory and socio-cultural constructivism,

each form is grounded by the theory of adult learning as focusing on the individual's ability to develop knowledge that is more meaningful to the context through interpreting and interacting with the environment. By adopting the constructivist approach, one acknowledges that the context in which adult learning occurs is continually influenced by cultural, political and dynamic social factors in the adult's life (Gravett 2005, Fenwick & Tennant 2004, Brown 1998, Cranton 1994).

As a social process, learning necessitates active participation and interaction with others, whilst drawing on previous experiences to construct new knowledge and understanding of the world. Learning is therefore dependent on how the adult interacts with their environment and interprets the differing experiences that denote the what, why and how of learning. In the current literature that attempts to define learning, key words like active engagement, participation and experience are central to the constructivist theory's approach to learning. The constructivist perspective purports learning to occur when new knowledge challenges existing knowledge and prior experiences that serve as frames of reference, thus requiring the construction of new meaning and conceptions. Different theorists agree that there is no one theory of adult learning, because adult learning occurs in a context that is dynamic and active, abound with unique cultural, social and physical circumstances (Gravett 2005, Fenwick & Tennant 2004, Hager 2004, Hansman 2001, Fenwick 1998).

3.2.1 Andragogy and Self-direction in Learning

There are many variants to adult learning theory; nonetheless, one which influenced and advanced adult learning discourse has been andragogy. Although other theorists have challenged andragogy as a theory of adult learning, it has provided the basic principles and conditions for attaining effective adult learning through the adoption of assumptions about how adults learn. According to Knowles (1984, 1990), the pioneer of andragogy, he suggested assumptions and expounded the principles on adult learning by formulating an adult learning theory from a humanist philosophical perspective. The theory states that adults learn because of the following:

- *The adults definition of their self concept is linked with being in control of one's life and able to make decisions about one's life*

- *Their need to know about the learning or why they are learning impacts learning*
- *Role of accumulated or prior experience as a resource in learning which can either enhance or inhibit the learning,*
- *Readiness to learn with reference to the relevance in their lives regarding developmental tasks,*
- *Orientation to learning for current relevance in task or problem centred orientation*
- *Motivation for learning mainly from internal drive but various stimuli can be motivating factors*

His learning theory also suggests that since adult learners are adult, by definition, their experiences, values and beliefs influence the learning process. One of the significant assumptions of adult learning relevant to this study is that adults take greater responsibility for their learning because of its meaningfulness in their lives. They are in a position to initiate their learning by choosing to engage in learning experiences for satisfying and fulfilling particular needs that they have diagnosed. This form of adult learning often referred to as self-directed learning, places the adult in a position of being able to make choices about what they learn or do not learn.

Brookfield (1985) defines self-directed learning as the process involving self-initiated and independent decisions on learning activities, based on the individual's ability to diagnose the need for learning. The self-directed individual demonstrates abilities of being able to decide on the learning goals by identifying the relevant resources required to fulfil the need for learning and eventually evaluate the learning experience. Self-direction also implies an internal change of consciousness in the individual, resulting in the desire for changes to how they define their world. This conscious change is the awareness of the desire or need to modify certain behaviour or attitude for better understanding. He further identifies an important condition for successful self-directed learners as being, "aware of context in the sense of placing their learning within a social setting in which advice, information is sought from others" (p44). Thus, his explanation of self-directedness in learning is likened to

Knowles's (1984) assertion, that as adults mature, the extent of definition of the self-concept results in the development of greater autonomy and control over ones' life, thus endorsing purposeful adult learning.

Andragogy, as an adult learning theory, has evoked discomfort resulting in critique from a variety of intellectuals in the discipline. Merriam (2001) raises some concern about the generalisation flaw of andragogy that assumes a likeness in adults. Debate around the theory raises questions of whether andragogy is actually a theory, a science or a form of technology that attempts to explain adult learning.

3.2.2 Transformative Learning Theory

A proponent of an adult learning theory that has provided changes in adult learning discourse also adopts a constructivist approach to learning by supporting the perspective of adult learning as a meaning-making process. Mezirow (1990) formulated a transformative learning theory of adult learning that involves the simultaneous restructuring of cognitive and emotional schema, which by so doing, change the learners self and thereby provide the learner with quantitatively new understanding and patterns of action. He further expatiates on his theory by explaining that a transformative learning experience is 'one where there is a transformation of meaning structures, when the learner makes an informed and reflective decision to act' (Mezirow 1998:p8). Merriam (2001) states that one of the goals of self-directed learning is to encourage transformational learning. It is through transformational learning where the adult attains some level of empowerment and develops an improved self-knowledge. Transformation occurs to our frames of references that are composed of meaning perspectives, which are the predispositions, and habits that people possess, along with meaning schemes comprised of our beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and value judgments that influence interpretations. Experiences that result in the changes in the frames of references become learning experiences only through a reflective process. This reflective process entails reasoning that results in action (Mezirow 1990).

Through transformative theory, Mezirow identifies three domains of learning where different forms of learning occur to produce certain types of knowledge. The instrumental domain is task-oriented learning, focusing on learning via solving problems. The communicative or dialogic learning domain is concerned with understanding, describing and explaining norms, practices, procedures, values and goals through dialogue and interacting with others. The final form of learning is the emancipatory domain, which centres on learning due to self-reflection and self-understanding. This form of learning results in personal change and transformation. Cranton (1994) posits that the domains interact. When learning transpires, the type of knowledge accessed can be from two or all domains of learning, depending on its purpose. Despite the domain, knowledge acquired through any of these domains results in changes in the individual. In the workplace, these types of learning call for the use of different approaches when making decisions on learning strategies, because the domains influence the nature and the emphasis of the learning experience in the work setting.

Therefore, according to this adult learning theory, three important interconnected processes are essential for learning to occur. The initial process involves the reframing of the held assumption in order to construct new meaning. This occurs after an incident or experience that provides new knowledge that contradicts or challenges existing knowledge thus causing discord in the individual. This discord results in critical reflection that is required for the assessment of current meaning structures. After the initial disarming experience, the individual then seeks an alternative perspective on the previously held dispositions, actions, reasoning and ideologies in order to attain some semblance of understanding and meaning to a situation. Some form of action ensues when a resolution based on meaning and understanding gained through reflection (Mezirow 1998, 1990).

This process also involves recognizing the hegemonic aspects of the dominant cultural values that influence an individual's behaviour and knowing. Hegemony is defined by Brookfield (1985) as the process where there is an unquestioned acceptance of a system of beliefs and practices, where people end up being abused

and controlled by this system in which they are deemed less powerful. Therefore, transformative learning entails recognizing and acknowledging one's outlook in relation to how it influences one's ability to be open to change. For reflection in learning to happen, conscious attention and awareness of the learning has to occur. This awareness changes the learning, thus making it an intentional act. Through the individual's awareness of their environment, a particular rational discourse that allows dialogue in order to continually challenge perspectives and construct new frames of reference is required. Discourse occurs through dialogue where perspectives and ideas are challenged among the different members of society and in the workplace (Brookfield 1995, Fenwick 2000, Gravett 2005, Baumgartner 2001).

Garrick (1998) explained discourses as ways of thinking and doing involving knowledge and power, which allow for the creation of meaning. Existing differences communicated through practices and procedures allow for the questioning of ideas, principles and perspectives for meaning construction purposes. It is within a discourse that meaning is created and understanding reformulated through dialogue. Another description is offered by Fenwick (2001), who regards discourse as a system of norms, values and symbols shaping particular beliefs and behaviours in people thus changing how they perceive their reality and themselves. She also mentions that discourses have the power to influence the various forms of knowledge thus invariably the decisions eventually made through understanding.

As part of adult learning theory, Mezirow (1994) emphasises that the ideal conditions for fostering transformative learning are those that encourage and allow full participation in discourse. In the workplace setting, this translates to an environment that fosters and acknowledges the importance of dialogue throughout the various levels using different channels within of the organisation.

However, there are concerns raised by Fenwick (1998) about stressing the use of dialogue in the workplace over other means of communication and expression like sensual, oral, non-verbal, artistic and intuitive communication. She maintains that in the workplace the existence of power, gender, class, age and job status issues, as well

as relationship dynamics, all influence the communication process and subsequently dialogue. Acknowledgment of the different factors that can either enhance or inhibit open dialogue becomes necessary to ensure the unhindered participation of the various stakeholders regardless of their status in the workplace.

3.2.3 The Holistic Approach

Illeris (2002) maintains that the transformative theory implies holistic changes that occur in the individual, not just in their personality, but also in their cognitive, emotional, and social-societal dimensions of the individual. He developed a perspective on adult learning that is three-dimensional, by proposing a learning theory that considers the worker as a human being, as a specific individual as well as a member of the present society. He identifies the cognitive, emotional, and social-societal dimension as important when addressing adult learning especially with reference to learning in the workplace. The first is the cognitive dimension, comprised of knowledge, skills and understanding, whilst the emotional dimension considers patterns of emotion, motivation and attitudes. The third dimension, which is the social-societal dimension, is where empathy, communication and cooperation are developed. This learning theory provides a more holistic perspective on understanding the learning process or learning situation as well as the different types or levels of learning that occurs in different contexts, which influence the complexity of what is learned. It considers the individual as a whole by not disregarding the different aspects that contribute to their total self and identity, which inadvertently would influence their ability to learn.

McManus (2006) and Hager (2004) concur with Illeris (2003) regarding the adoption of the holistic approach to adult learning, especially in the workplace where the focus is on the learner, the learning environment, the learning output along with the different types and modes of learning. These authors agree that a holistic approach that considers the worker as a whole person, which recognizes that the worker as a learner has an intellect, values, experiences and daily practices that can contribute towards productive learning is a more appropriate approach for the adult learner. This productive learning occurs when the reasons for learning, the methods or

approaches to the learning as well as the usefulness of the learning are considered as important aspects of the learning process. Productive learning also involves the creation of new learning that simultaneously reshapes the environment in which the learning occurs thus making it more meaningful to the individual. The notion of productive learning embraces holistic learning by recognising the humane characteristics of individuals (McManus 2006, Hager 2004).

The holistic approach to adult learning theory has the underpinnings of andragogical principles of autonomy and self-direction in learning. The WSP as an instrument to promote learning in the working environment seeks to attend to worker developmental needs either of a personal nature or for work purposes. Striking a balance in satisfying the different learning needs of workers pertaining to their dimensional nature should be reflected on the WSP. The instrument has the potential of providing opportunities for learning that is meaningful and transformative in nature. The initial stage of the process of compiling the WSP involves the identification of learning needs. This identification of needs, if the individual conducts it, signifies part of the learning process involving self-diagnosis. According to adult learning theory self-diagnosis and autonomy in decision-making regarding learning and development for whatever reason, is an essential characteristic of self-direction in learning that is a desirable quality for meaningful learning.

3.3 WORKPLACE LEARNING THEORY

3.3.1 Influences of Globalisation

Workplace learning theory attempts to explain how adults learn in the work environment. This form of learning believed to be important for ensuring that workers remain proficient in their performance uses a multiplicity of approaches. One of the driving forces towards the developing interest in workplace learning has been the advent of globalisation. Globalisation as a 21st century phenomenon, has ensured that there is constant need for keeping up with the demand for proficiency, efficiency, effectiveness, improved productivity and performance in the workplace,

which would be reason enough for engaging in learning activities at work. Merriam (1993) states that the adult's orientation and preoccupation with learning in these times of globalisation, centres on acquiring the necessary skills currently required for conducting their work functions. This statement implies that the external forces that dictate the survival of organisations in the business world influence the learning that occurs in the workplace. On the other hand, one assumes that adults engage themselves in learning in the workplace for a variety of reasons and purposes and not exclusively for being proficient in their jobs.

Faris (2003) provides details of how globalisation as a phenomenon has greatly transformed the world and resulted in the knowledge based economy and society, characterized and enhanced by the rapid developments and changes in information, communication, and technological knowledge spheres (ICT). He maintains that these spheres (ICT) form the key elements that provide an impetus for these rapid changes in the world. The requirement for skilled workers implies that the individual's need for learning and education is of a current nature, and specifically for work purposes. If this is the case, then it implies that the worker's developmental tasks where learning is required are mainly work related rather than socially defined. These advancements and rapid changes in knowledge and information technology by dictating learning in the workplace have the ability of undermining the adoption of the holistic approach to learning by emphasising worker capabilities and proficiencies.

The establishment of the NSDS and related skills development legislation was in part motivated by expeditious global developments that South Africa could not ignore. Due to increased skills demands in the country, the governmental directives for the achievement of these requirements dictated for the adoption of the instrument like the WSP for ensuring that workplaces provide an environment that promotes learning for employees. The learning reflected in the WSP indicates the direction and nature of the learning initiatives encouraged in the organisation for its continued viability and success. The focuses of programs emphasising proficiency and effectiveness in performance over personal development also indicate the

development also indicate the organisation's orientation and attitude towards the influences of globalisation in business. The organisational stance would also determine the approach adopted for workplace learning practice.

3.3.2 Influences of Lifelong Learning

Workplace learning as an activity and as a process is part of the lifelong learning discourse and philosophy. As a process, it involves an idealized situation of incessant reasoned learning towards desirable outcomes for the individual and the organisation (Matthews 1999). She suggests that these outcomes "should foster the sustained development of both individual and the organisation within the present and future organisational goals and individual career development". This never-ending learning aligns itself with the lifelong principles that are currently topical in the developed and developing countries.

The lifelong learning discourse in the workplace has a humanist perspective and a human capitalist or economist perspective. With globalisation, lifelong learning is a two-pronged sword with two distinct purposes. On one side, lifelong learning presents a defence mechanism against global competitors, where continuous learning has to occur in the world of work in order to remain competitive in the global market. However, another view of lifelong learning in the workplace considers it as a means of embracing globalisation, where, in order for an individual to become an acceptable global citizen, the individual has to acquire new skills, attitudes and adopt acceptable behaviour by the dominant culture (Field 2000).

The two streams upon which the lifelong learning discourse in the workplace is based has desirable and undesirable features that influence workplace learning theory, where continuous learning can serve as a liberator or as a tool for enslavement, wielding political power by those who have the ability to enforce their agendas (Cruikshank 2002). As a liberator, it ensures that learning is supported in the workplace through the provision of opportunities availed to workers for personal and work related development. Alternatively, as an oppressive tool, lifelong learning serves to perpetuate objectionable ideological practices and procedures in

the workplace, especially those relating to issues and decisions on learning and development.

In the workplace environment, lifelong learning is manifested through the continuous drive in organisations for keeping abreast of information and technological developments that impact on productivity. Employees are encouraged to engage in educational experiences to remain current and employable. This idea is supported by Cruikshank (2002:p145) who states that, “under the lifelong learning banner training will presumably equip workers to enable them to compete for jobs in the high skills economy”.

A cyclical relationship exists between these key elements of lifelong learning and development in the workplace, which further promote the goals, and purposes of globalisation. Since workers are adult by various definitions, they constitute a vital part of an organisation, and it is therefore important to be able to understand the nature and practice of adult learning in the workplace. Employers and employees find themselves caught between the two aspects of the lifelong learning debate, but its essence remains, that there is presently a need for continuous learning and development in the workplace for meeting job-related or personal needs.

The NSDS, through the adoption of the lifelong learning approach, intends on providing a platform for fostering and supporting worker development. Although it is legislated change, organisations as employers are expected to assume responsibility for skills development by advancing change in organisational culture towards that which cultivates a learning culture in their workplaces.

3.3.3 Challenges to Theory Development

Interest on how learning in the workplace influences organisational and employee development is at the forefront of debates in the human, social and intellectual capital theories of adult learning in the workplace discourse. There is currently a great deal of debate on the inter-changeability of the concepts that are part of the

discussions on learning, training and human resource development in organisations. Literature and theories on concepts such as *Organisational Learning* (Field 2004, Argyris 2001), *The Learning Organisation* (Garavan 1997a, Senge 1990), *Workplace Learning* (Lee, Fuller, Ashton, Butler, Felstead, Unwin and Walters 2004, Illeris 2003, Matthews 1999 and Billet 2002a), and *Work-related Learning* (Illeris 2004a, Illeris 2004b), share a common interest in the development of the human resources attained through the process of learning in an organisation refer to Fig.1.

The central ideology in all these concepts focuses on the various forms of learning and knowledge creation that occurs at individual and organisational level that can influence marked changes for workers in their personal and professional lives as employees and subsequently in the organisation, which is the employer. Garrick (1990) proposes workplace learning theory anchored around four dominant discourses that attempt to explain the practice and discussion around issues of learning, education and training in the workplace. The human capital discourse, the experiential learning discourse, cognition, expertise discourse, and the generic skills discourse that all have an influence in the nature, practice and processes of workplace learning. A discussion on the paradigms of learning in the workplace later in the text will consider the human capital theory and different forms of experiential learning.

Workplaces as sites for learning are not neutral environments. Fenwick (2001), in agreement with Field (2004), highlights the sociological and economic pressures that form the basis of the many arguments of learning and education at work. They both agree that workplaces as political spaces shape the nature of the learning occurring there. There exists a political interest in the manner that learning in the workplace is perceived and accepted. It would be to the detriment of the personnel involved in promoting and facilitating workplace learning to ignore the political dimensions of workplaces as proposed sites of learning.

Management is usually responsible for this task of providing learning opportunities to workers. Acknowledging the intricate and subtle political undercurrents in the

work setting by providing an environment conducive for workplace learning is a key responsibility for managers. Billet (2002a) and Keep (2001) highlight the inequitable and selective practices that affect the distribution of learning opportunities among workers. Factors normally found in the workplace, such as workplace hierarchies, cultural practices, workplace cliques, employment status, educational levels and the age of workers, somehow determine access to learning opportunities. Therefore, Rainbird (2000) emphasises the recognition of the political undertones that provide the answers to the questions of who, why, what, when and how of important aspects of training matters that influence workplace learning. It is also crucial to understand that the activities that involve learning and training in the workplace for advancement, rewards, development, and control over production are part of a broader agenda driven by the organisation for varied reasons.

A different stance concerning the formulation of workplace learning theory is suggested by Field (2004), Garrick and Rhodes (1998) and Hager (2004). A postmodernist perspective for explaining workplace learning theory is suggested by these authors. It highlights the varied interests, the complex nature and power-instilled view of learning to give a more holistic perspective on understanding learning in the workplace. The postmodernist approach of organisational and workplace learning aims at questioning absolute principles of reasoning by challenging theories of practice and established knowledge in organisations. This approach attempts to explain the current trends in the commodification of knowledge and information, especially in arenas where this form of knowledge and information is fundamental to the prosperity of the business. This commodification can be seen in the sudden increase in the number of privately-owned facilities offering training, learning, and development in the workplace.

The change in the South African context, with its focus on high skills training, has seen an increased interest in skills development issues and in the number of programs and services offered by private institutions relating to training and skills development interventions. The skills training field has become a very lucrative business for many entrepreneurs wanting to get a piece of the pie in the skills

development budgets of organisations and from the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). This evokes the question of who exactly benefits from learning initiatives that fall under the guise of training and development of workers reflected on the WSP.

There is great debate on the question of the assumptions about benefits of learning in the workplace. Workplace learning as an empowerment design assumes that the learning occurring in the workplace is beneficial for both the individual employee through professional development and the employer through improved productivity. Spencer (2002), along with Garrick and Rhodes (1998), highlights the dangers of adopting this attitude that workplace learning has a mutual benefit for employer and employee especially concerning skills training policies. They argue that this assumption makes workplace learning more inclined to be a new form of oppression and control of the workplace, where employers are able to exert power over employees through controlling training, learning, and development initiatives in the organisation. Spencer (2002) further cites the research conducted by Jackson & Jordan (2000) on the mutual benefits of skills training program in Australia and New Zealand. They discovered that the benefits and control over skills training were actually only enjoyed by private capital and not the individuals (employees) it was meant to benefit.

The ultimate aim for the WSP is to promote learning in the organisation for all employees. There is an assumption that through its implementation there is mutual benefit for both the employer and the employee. Part of the secondary question in this research attempts to answer the question of who benefits from the WSP in the organisation. The assumption is that the benefits derived from this instrument can be of mutual gain depending on the manner of its introduction into the organisation. Is it clearly understood by all in the organisation, and what is the extent of the involvement of the workers in its compilation? It is important that the workers understand the role played by the WSP in organisational success and well-being as well as for their own personal growth. The perceptions on the usefulness of

the WSP should provide an indication on who is gaining from the implementation of this instrument.

Other concerns on workplace learning theory are offered by Fenwick (1998), who identifies the dangers of devaluing certain knowledge that the workers may have if this knowledge is unaligned with organisational values or does not contribute to the shared vision. This is especially important in organisations where informal learning and tacit knowledge gained from actual work experience have a prominent role to play in work performance but is not formally recognised. Through the WSP this form of learning can be accorded its rightful place by being documented formally on the plan.

3.3.4 Summary

Theorists acknowledge the complex nature of the concept of workplace learning theory, which involves more than just training and development issues. There is no single theory that explains workplace learning due to the multidimensional and multidisciplinary nature of learning in the workplace. Lifelong learning, the effects of globalisation, political nature of work and post-modernist thought are some of the debates that influence theory development which make the task of formulating a single theory more challenging.

3.4 PARADIGMS OF WORKPLACE LEARNING THEORY

Paradigms of workplace learning are influenced by the different disciplines and approaches to understanding what determines the learning of individuals in the workplace. The paradigms of workplace learning, although not conclusive as basis for theory formulation, offer a platform for facilitating the discussion on workplace learning theory. Lee *et al* (2004) suggest an approach to workplace learning theory from two distinct perspectives that either regard learning as a product or learning as acquisition. Learning as a product is supported by the human capital and economic theories that emphasise learning for increased productivity and improved competitiveness for business viability. Whilst learning as acquisition of knowledge

and skills has a more holistic perspective that regards learning as a process of participation that is not separable from social relations of production.

Recent interest in organisational learning and the learning organisation has brought attention to the concept of learning in the workplace as an individual, social and organisational process. The inclusion of human capital as important to human resource development in organisations makes significant contribution to the discussion on workplace learning theory. The following discussion is based on the work of Lee *et al* (2004) who present the different paradigms and theoretic perspectives that have emerged as an attempt to formulate a comprehensive workplace learning theory.

3.4.1 Standard Paradigm

The standard paradigm of learning focuses on the individual's ability to acquire knowledge, resulting in a change in behaviour or understanding. This acquisition orientation perceives learning as a product where the learner occasionally obtains "discrete pieces of knowledge" useful for performing certain tasks (Hager 2004:p9, Lee *et al* 2004). This paradigm renders knowledge and skills acquisition, as a series of exercises not necessarily related to each other or applicable to one another, but somehow necessary at some point for task performance. Lee *et al* (2003) further mention the common features of the standard paradigm where workplace learning centres on the individual's capabilities to learn, with an emphasis on the reflection in action, rational and cognitive aspects of work performance. This stance of explaining workplace learning theory borrows heavily from adult learning theory and philosophy which has been discussed under the adult learning theory section at the beginning of the chapter. Therefore, the following discussion briefly explains the role of adult learning theory in the development of workplace learning theory using the standard paradigm of learning as acquisition.

Adult learning theory expounding on the reflective process, regards learning as an individual process brought about by changes in meaning schemes and perspectives requiring critical thinking. Experience that triggers dissonance, critical reflection, and

reflective discourse are the main components of transformative learning theory. Learning through reflection is widely supported in adult learning theory by various theorists who adopt the constructivist perspective to learning (Gravett 2005, Mezirow 1990, Baumgartner 2001). The biggest proponent on the importance of reflection in learning is Mezirow (1994, 1990) who proposed the transformative theory of learning for adults.

Although transformative theory is widely accepted, there is critique on the issue of focusing on reflection in learning in the workplace. Fenwick (2001) citing Britzman (1998) offers a critique on the notion of critical reflection as an important aspect of adult learning in the workplace. They maintain that the continued focus on critical reflection simplifies learning and ignores the individual's desires, ambivalences and resistances to learning. In the workplace, learning as a reflective process places emphasis on the individual nature of the learning experience that is in contrast with some of the literature on organisational learning and workplace learning that regard learning in the workplace as being a unitary experience (Betts and Holden 2003). The notion of workplace learning as being a unitary experience is also problematic for various theorists who argue that the process of learning can never be the same for all in the organisation (Gravett 2005, Fenwick 2001 Garrick and Rhodes 1998). This issue is discussed in more detail under the section of organisational learning which in principle is linked to the standard paradigm but has been treated separately in this study.

3.4.2 Emerging Paradigm of Learning as Participation

The emerging paradigm of learning in the workplace highlights the social, cultural and contextual aspects of learning in the workplace. This paradigm regards knowledge as constructed and reconstructed through active engagement and interactions between individuals in a particular context. Learning is regarded as a process that is participative in nature and involves the whole individual (Lee *et al* 2004, Hager 2004). This paradigm emphasises that learning occurs in the context in which the adult participates. Participation entails that learning is a communal process of reflection, interpreting and negotiating meaning among members of a

specific community. This learning is enabled through dialogue and interchanging of ideas (Stein 1998).

According to Wenger (1999), learning is a social process influenced and guided by membership in a group. It occurs when there is interplay between socially defined competence and an individual's experiences. This form of adult learning referred to as learning through a community of practice, occurs through participation and interaction with the community, its tools, purpose and the norms in the group. Language and the use of symbols facilitate learning through interaction. He defines a community of practice as any group of individuals who work together for a period developing particular ways of doing things and talking about things that their members come to learn. The concept of communities of practice that encourages learning through informal learning processes has gained much interest in workplace learning. He further suggests that organisations should place a lot of emphasis on meaningful participation for learning and building identities through forming memberships in the organisation. Prior discussions in the literature review have resolved that workplaces form excellent sites for learning. As such, in workplaces through the kinship of workers with different groupings of people, learning occurs through interaction between each other, through a shared language and through participating in an activity, thus forming the basis for learning through communities of practice. This knowledge attained through undertaking actual activities whilst guided by more experienced individuals within a culture of practice is a type of workplace learning. Billet (2002a) refers to this form of learning as guided practice. He states that guided practice requiring active participation in learning, has the potential of effectively enhancing learning in, from and through the work.

The notion of learning as participation is not cognitive in nature but is determined by "changing processes of human participation in a particular community of practice" (Fenwick & Tennant 2004:p63). The social and cognitive nature of workplace learning is a reflection of the dual nature of individuals as social beings whose identity and sense of self is socially defined from social experience, whilst also possessing cognitive capabilities that influence adult learning (Billet 2004). He

mentions that there is inter-dependence to this dualism of cognitive and social experiences in learning in the workplace. Therefore, the process of learning in this paradigm is not separable from active engagement in a particular community or grouping of people, within a specific context amid a common purpose.

Although participation is important for learning, it does not guarantee that learning will occur. Hager (2004) and Billet (2002a, 2004) highlight the existence of a variety of factors existing in groups along with changing group dynamics that may contribute barriers to learning in a community of practice or group setting. Issues of placement in the work hierarchal structure, age, educational levels are among some of the barriers to learning especially in a community of practice. These factors also influence the nature and extent of the learning within the group.

Although, the learning in this paradigm is socially influenced and constructed, it is nevertheless still an individual experience. Understanding workplace learning and development can assist the task of developing individual and group capacities. Therefore, this form of learning and knowledge created through interacting with others within a context is also known as situated learning or context based learning that belongs to the broader category of experiential and reflective learning approaches (Hansman 2001, Stein 1998).

3.4.3 Organisational Learning

The discourse on the concepts on organisational learning and the learning organisation draws its theory from the disciplines of management, psychology, human resource development (Garavan 1997a). Organisational learning is important and relevant to the development of workplace learning theory because the discourse encompasses issues on learning in the organisational setting. Some of the literature on the above concepts focuses on the organisational culture as being central to what defines a learning organisation, characterized by continuous learning as individuals and collectively (Senge 1990), whilst others identify desirable attributes that organisations possess for them to become learning organisations (Marsick & Watkins 1990). Another group of authors focuses on the individual workers ability

to learn that renders the organisation a learning organisation (Argyris 1999, Dixon 1994), whereas others like Illeris (2003) refer to the concepts as misnomers because only humans have the abilities and qualities to learn.

An attempt at defining organisational learning always relies on the underlying epistemological assumptions and perspective of the author or intellectual. Bell, Whitwell, Lukas (2002) suggest the following four theoretical perspectives that provide a clearer understanding of organisational learning.

- *The development perspective* that is geared on the growth of the organisation due to changes in the organisation processes and procedure resulting in the adoption of a learning orientation
- *Normative perspective* where learning in the organisation occurs through the existence of certain conditions, criteria or circumstances for the creation of a conducive environment to learning
- *Process perspective* which regards the learning of individuals as the building blocks to organisational learning
- *Economic perspective* linked to knowledge creating for the purposes of improved productivity through adopting various cost reducing mechanisms. This perspective is also explicable through the human capital debate.

There is strong debate on the plausible ability of organisations to learn. The main argument opposing this concept of organisational learning is that organisations cannot learn but it is the people, who as employees within these organisations that are able to learn. The process view of explaining organisational learning by regarding it as a socially constructed phenomenon is gaining favour in current organisational learning discourse that acknowledge the role played by learning through interaction in a group. It can be related to the idea of the emerging paradigm of learning through participation.

Argyris (1999) perceives organisational learning as a process in which organisations adapt to their changing environment by generating and selectively adopting organisational routines in terms of behaviours and processes. These organisational routines change through the learning of individuals, thus making organisational

learning a strategy for managing change. He emphasises that the theory of organisational learning must consider the interplay between the actions and interactions of individuals within the organisation and those that occur between individuals and the higher level organisational entities like the different departments, divisions and group of managers within the organisation. These higher-level entities also have actions and interaction among themselves that influence the "what" and "how" of learning in the organisation. Understanding the interplay, the power relations and dynamics within the organisation can have a positive influence on the organisations capabilities to learn.

Another relevant definition of organisational learning was proposed by Dixon (1994; p5) who said:

“Organisational learning is the intentional use of learning processes at the individual, group and system level to continually transform the organisation in the direction that is increasingly satisfying to the stakeholders”.

It is evident from the definition that the learning initiatives aimed at making a conscious effort to bring about changes that will produce a positive outcome for the various stakeholders within and outside the organisation. Workers as stakeholders in the organisation become involved in these learning initiatives for a similar purpose. Therefore, organisational learning occurs through the learning of the individuals within that organisation.

The question of who owns the knowledge and skills is a contentious issue in organisational learning, where some authors contend that ownership of knowledge and skills is collective despite the existence of multiple perspectives held by individuals. There are also questions on who benefits from the notion of organisational learning. Betts and Holden (2003) and Kim (2004) attest that, although it is individual learning that advances organisational learning, the group as a whole benefits from such learning. This unitary element of organisational learning poses a problem for various authors (Keeps 2001, Garrick and Rhodes 1998, Fenwick 1998 and Garavan 1997a). The assumption of a collective and unitary nature of organisational learning is one of the weaknesses to the organisational

learning argument because it renders individual learning less important than group learning. It also implies that, all that individuals learn is the property of the organisation, for organisational processes and procedures; therefore, they become inseparable from the organisations.

Garrick and Rhodes (1998) offer a postmodernist perspective on organisational learning that questions its focus on control and suppressing difference for the benefit of the collective in the organisation. They suggest using deconstruction as an approach to understanding organisational learning. Deconstruction as a tool for post-modern thinking provides a way of thinking about learning in organisations using language, words and text. "It offers a critical way of generating organisational knowledge which overturns assumptions by leaving them open to multiple interpretations so as to overcome a domination of ideas" (p177). Acknowledging issues of difference, diversity and fragmentation enhances learning from different perspectives and challenging dominant discourse in the organisation.

3.4.4 The Learning Organisation

A similar development concerning learning in organisations is that of the learning organisation. Senge (1990), the most prominent advocate of the learning organisation, conceptualizes it around the notion that organisations are able to facilitate the learning of individuals, to equip them with the tools necessary to easily respond to changes that are external or internal to the learning organisations. The key feature in the learning organisation ideology is the organisations capability to adapt to continuous change and innovation brought about by the demands for increased productivity and effectiveness of the global economy. It is the individual workers learning capabilities as well as the organisation's ability to learn, resulting in changes, which renders an organisation as a learning organisation. The learning organisation supports and encourages learning by workers (Tjepkema 2004). It accomplishes this by fostering learning, by being open to continuously questioning current solutions and processes, thus allowing change through new knowledge for corporate success (Van Dyke *et al* 2002). It is this ability to continually transform in

the face of changes internally and externally that distinguishes organisations that have a learning orientation from those that do not.

The adoption of a learning orientation, also referred to as a learning culture in organisations, encourages the establishment of the learning organisation ethos. Johnston and Hawke's (2002:p33) definition of learning culture implies a

“Deliberate arrangement designed to maximize productive work in a highly competitive environment where the organisational systems have to be designed to support the development of employees if productivity goals are to be achieved”

This development of a learning culture has close links with the lifelong learning philosophy promoted in the workplace learning discourse. Therefore, the learning organisation involves both natural and planned synergy between mission accomplishment and opportunities for both professional and personal growth of employees at all levels in the organisation” (Dilworth 1996:407)

Another important theme in the learning organisation is the concept of systems thinking that highlights the importance of the interconnectedness of all the components that make up the organisation (Senge 1990, Fenwick 1998). Systems thinking is one of the five disciplines suggested by Senge (1990) as essential to the development of learning organisations, which are: personal mastery; mental models; shared vision and team learning. For the purposes of this discussion, these disciplines will not be explained except for systems thinking which is relevant to this discussion. Systems thinking acknowledges the interrelatedness and importance of the cooperation of the various components in the organisation as well as the recurring patterns of behaviour that generate shared meaning necessary for change and corporate success and sustainability.

Many characteristics are advanced for the learning organisation. Fenwick (1998) cites Watkins and Marsick (1993), who refer to those organisations with a learning orientation as those that are able to create continuous learning opportunities for their employees, promote enquiry and dialogue, and establish systems to capture and

share learning, empower people towards a shared vision and connect the organisation to its environment.

Garavan (1997a) offers more simplistic explanations of the learning organisation as an environment that enhances employee and organisational learning undertaken by everyone, regardless of designation or level, in all departments throughout their working lives. He proposes three stages deemed necessary for this type of organisation wanting to realize the learning organisation ideology. The first stage involves the acquisition of information through experience, followed by the dissemination of information and lastly, shared implementation achieved through the consensus on the meaning of information. Dialogue becomes important in the learning organisation for information sharing. Dialogue in the workplace becomes a process more intricate than mere discussions between colleagues. It encompasses the interaction between colleagues where ideas are exchanged.

Although there is much debate about the benefits of adopting the various attributes of learning organisations, the concept and practice is critiqued by several authors. They highlight the fact that the notion of the learning organisation assumes that all stakeholders in the organisation benefit from continuous learning, teamwork, flexibility, and participation. It assumes a win-win situation for all in the organisation, which is not necessarily true. It also highlights the assumption about the role played by managers as willing and capable of engaging in meaningful learning, which is incorrect (Keep2001).

Fenwick (1998) also argues that since learning is a natural process, the learning organisation concept distorts learning into a tool for competitive advantage, where the individual learns not for growth but for the benefits of the organisation. She also mentions that a principle of continuous learning in teams ignores the human dimension of knowledge and meaning-making that is influenced by office politics. Those in power can use the learning organisation practice to continue serving the ideology of the elite and thus can also abuse it.

The concept of learning organisations and organisational learning are important to the effective usage of the WSP for availing and affording learning opportunities to employees. Ideally, the organisational learning objectives attainable through the various learning and training initiative implemented through the WSP reflected the extent of alignment of the learning strategies to organisational strategic developmental priorities. The importance of the establishment of an organisational learning culture also cannot be ignored, along with its improved values and attitudes towards learning which all influence the what, how and when of learning that occurs. Both these concepts tread along the lifelong learning philosophy by encouraging and acknowledging the need for provision of continuous learning opportunities in the adults' working lives for personal and work-related development.

3.4.5 Human Capital Theory

As part of the human resource development discourse, human capital theory cannot be sidelined when discussing workplace-learning theory. The current discourse on workplace learning theory is greatly influenced by economics and human resource development theory in the form of human capital theory as opposed to a more general focus on workplace learning from an educational perspective. Garrick (1998) insists that the sub-discourses of human resource management affect human capital, learning and development in organisations. Schuller (2000) defines human capital as:

“All the knowledge, skills, competencies and other attributes that are embodied in the individual that are relevant and necessary to economic activity.”

The focus is on the economic behaviour of an individual, how this translates into knowledge & skills that will enable them to increase their productivity and wealth for themselves, the organisation and subsequently their societies. This theory is concerned with the quality of the workforce and its improvement for the purposes of increased productivity. The idea is that it equates the investment by an organisation in knowledge and skills through learning and training initiatives to economic returns for the individual worker through promotions and increased

income, and collectively for the organisation through increased productivity and profits. The main reason for engaging in learning activities in the workplace would be for improving the efficiency and proficiency of the workers skills for the benefit of the organisation.

The key to this theory is the acquisition of new skills and knowledge in order to increase the value of the individual in the workplace thereby increasing their employability, income potential and productivity. Implications for this are that companies that invest in the human resources regard their employees as valuable assets and means to achieving their business objectives. The assumption that the more staff becomes valuable for the organisation, the higher the chances of remaining employed is a misleading notion linked with the human capital discourse. Unfortunately, with the rapid changes in the world of information, knowledge and skills acquisition an employee is worth in the organisation remains uncertain no matter how great an organisation's commitment to investment in learning, training and development initiatives.

Proponents of the human capital theory support this paradigm where the emphasis of skills development, training and education focuses on improving business productivity and competitiveness in the markets through the competent workforce. Xiao (2001) citing (Becker 1964) explains the concepts of human capital as the notion of improving the productivity of workers by imparting useful skills and knowledge through education and training activities that are available in the workplace. The skills acquired through these educational endeavours are job related and defined by organisational requirements for meeting organisational skills needs.

Human capital theory often draws critique for down-playing and sometimes ignoring the role played by the social, organisational and cultural factors in influencing learning (Lee *et al* 2004). Emphasis placed on viewing the worker not as a social being but as a means to a profitable end for the organisation is objectionable. This disregard for the humane aspect of individual workers is detrimental to the effectiveness of learning initiatives in the organisation. Coffield

(1999) commented on this theory as having overshadowed the importance of social and cultural theory as useful tools needed for supporting lifelong learning. Focus on human capital has also tended to exclude those workers whose value in the workplace is measured according to their contribution. He sees the unabated adoption of this theory as a means of social control that encourages polarization in the workplace and in education.

In the workplace, this polarization manifests itself through the grouping and categorising of the work as highly skilled and those that are under skilled thus resulting in the working haves and working have-nots, where this can influence access to learning opportunities. According to him, human capital does not actually address issues of division of labour according to gender and its impact on lifelong learning. He suggests that human capital theory should not view the workforce in a vacuum and disregard the contextual issues outside the organisation that have a bearing on the worker and their overall performance.

Therefore, a focus on investment in training and skills development of workers should not totally emphasise a return on investment through improved work performance, increased productivity translated through increased profits, but should also include issues of personal and social development of workers. The WSP has a responsibility of highlighting and documenting the investment on current organisational skills needs and future skills needs projections relating to the personal and social development of workers. Appropriate development of human capital, in alignment with the organisational developmental priorities should be evidenced in the WSP.

3.5 FORMAL, INFORMAL AND NON FORMAL LEARNING

Since the workplace is referred to as being an excellent site for offering different forms of learning opportunities for the employee (Rainbird 2000, Mathew 1999, Illeris 2003, Caldwell 2000, Billet 2001), these learning activities occur in a variety of ways referred to as, formal, non formal to informal, intentional and incidental forms

learning. Each form of learning is influenced and defined by the learning context in which the learner finds him or herself.

Although, it is important to understand the theory of workplace, learning it is also essential to understand the nature of the learning that occurs in the workplace. The manner in which the worker embraces learning opportunities and activities along with their learning styles determines the actual effectiveness of the learning that occurs in the workplace. Workplace learning theory describes and explains the theory denoting particular ways of learning in the workplace through the usage of the different forms of learning like situated learning or cognition and communities of practice (Wenger 1999, Billet 1994), Experiential learning and Action Learning (Kolb 1996), Transformative learning (Mezirow 1991) to mention a few. These different forms of learning form part of the broader discourse of informal learning in the workplace. Each theorist adopts a particular stance informed by how individuals learn best through their daily activities, through interacting with each other and operating through the organisation's systems and procedures.

The outcomes of learning reveal themselves through the individual's skills and knowledge acquired or through the knowledge that is incorporated in the organisation's memory, routines and procedures. Some workplace learning processes are structured in such a way that they have a pedagogic nature manifested through more formal learning processes, whilst others are integrated into the work and production processes depicting informal and non-formal learning experiences. The language used to denote workplace learning proclaim this exercise as learning in the workplace, learning from work, learning at work, learning through work or workplace based learning. Much debate surrounds the different forms of workplace learning that enhance the effectiveness of workplace learning for knowledge acquisition and transference (Billet 2002a, Billet 2002b, Robotham 2003, Lee *et al* 2004).

Learning in the workplace occurs along a continuum where it is difficult to distinguish between the different forms of learning. However, understanding the

different forms of learning can contribute toward improvement of the workplace learning initiatives guided in this case by the WSP.

The classroom type of formal, structured learning is the common mode of learning in the workplace. Informal learning is an embracing term that explains the different forms of learning through experience and from interacting with others in the working environment. Ellinger's (2004) definition of informal learning as a form of learning that is planned or unplanned, intentional or unintentional, structured or unstructured forms of learning that require consciousness to some extent that learning is occurring. This learning occurs through the opportunities presented to the worker consciously or unconsciously throughout their working life. Garrick (1998) points out the key characteristics of informal learning include experiential learning, non-institutional learning, self-directed learning and intentional learning. These forms of learning have gained popularity in the workplace through the works of Wenger (1994) on situated learning, Argyris (1999) on adaptive learning and generative learning organisational learning, Marsick and Watkins (1994) and Garavan (1997a) on informal and incidental learning.

Bates *et al* (2005) have proposed the adoption of a model for understanding workplace learning developed by Hodkinson & Hodkinson (2004). This model considers the learning that is intentional (formal learning) and unintentional (informal/incidental learning) which the learner can acquire from others (participative learning) or from very new learning experiences. They have formulated a typology of learning that has six different forms of learning in the workplace.

- Learning that which others know in an intentional or planned learning situation
- Learning that which others know as unintentional or unplanned learning
- Development of existing capabilities considered as intentional learning
- Development of existing capabilities regarded as unintentional learning
- Learning that which is new is viewed as intentional learning

- Learning that which is new regarded as learning unintentionally

This typology is comparable to the learning strategy developed by Franz (2002) on learning competencies. He identified four stages of learning where there is learning, relearning and de-learning for competence.

- Unconscious incompetence where the individual does not know that they do not know
- Conscious incompetence where the individual knows what they don't know
- Conscious competence individual knows what they know
- Unconscious competence where the individual does not know what they know.

These different forms of learning incorporate the main metaphors of learning that has been discussed above namely, learning as reflection and participation occurring in either an informal, formal or a non-formal manner. Learning as reflection resulting in transformative learning can occur with intentional learning whilst learning through participation can be both intentional and unintentional learning. In the workplace these forms of learning cannot be simplistically categorised because in the learning context there can be more than one type of learning that feed into another form. The types of learning initiatives and interventions adopted through the WSP indicate the forms of learning preferred in the organisations. The WSP template provides a category where indications on the form of learning whether formal or informal are made. There is currently no provision for non-formal learning. Does this mean that this form of learning is not recognised as a legitimate form of acquiring knowledge? This would be unfortunate since in the work setting there are many opportunities for non-formal learning. Current debate in the formulation of workplace learning theory promotes the informal learning approach as one that enhances meaningful learning.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The current knowledge era resulting from rapid changes in technology, communication and lifestyles has made the workplace to be an important learning environment. Adults spend a sizeable portion of their lives at work, therefore, it seems obvious that this place should offer learning opportunities geared towards either personal development or improving work performance. Whatever the reasons and motivations are for adult learning in the workplace, their ability to learn and embrace change is deemed important for well-being and business survival. Various theorists agree that an organisation's adaptability and flexibility in this global business context determines its capacity to learn and continue learning for increased sustainability and competitiveness in the market (Lee *et al* 2004, Illeris 2003, Van Dyke *et al* 2002, Fenwick 2001, and Rainbird 2000).

In order to understand the concept and application of workplace learning theory, a key requirement would be the integration of a range of diverse factors and aspects ranging from adult learning, human capital development, and organisational needs to political, individual and shared interest in the organisation. The contribution of adult learning theory through the transformative learning theory signifies the role played by critical reflection and self-direction in learning in the workplace. It is the perspective of meaningful learning occurring in a variety of ways in the workplace, as an individual and social process, through active engagement and participation in a community of practice that has gained much ground in contributing to workplace learning theory.

Current focus on organisational learning and the learning organisation simply affirms the significance of employee learning in the workplace for business development and success. Much research and understanding still has to occur on the development and distinction of concepts like organisational learning and the learning organisation where a variety of authors uses the word interchangeably to denote learning that is occurring in workplace for organisational development and change.

The human capital theory encapsulates this ideology from an economist perspective where the development of workers is mainly for the financial gain of the employer. Learning occurring in this environment serves the purposes of workers improving their skills for improving productivity and profits, thus subsequently improving their own financial standing.

The different forms of learning discussed have relevance in workplace learning by making learning accessible in a variety of ways that can be incorporated into task performances.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of workplace learning has a multidisciplinary relevance supported by the crosscutting, multidisciplinary nature of the discourse, reflected in the choice of paradigm for this study. The constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm forms the basis for the qualitative research design and methodology. This paradigm seeks to interpret and understand the subjective realities that influence human behaviour; in this case, it seeks to understand adult learning in the workplace context. It allows for the examining of meaning socially and experientially constructed, whilst accepting that values and perceptions held by people differ among groups and in different places. The interpretivist paradigm regards learning as a process of interactions that lead to a better understanding of the meaning of experiences. It acknowledges that there is no one reality that is measured therefore it allows different voices to be heard (Rubin & Rubin 1995, Krauss 2005).

The constructivist paradigm has assumptions that display the ontological relativism where the issue of reality is dependent on the creation of meaning by individuals based socially, experientially and through mental capabilities. Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that reality is not absolute and true, but is a result of the continuous creation of meaning through perception. Therefore, the constructivist approach implies that individuals possess knowledge that is influenced and shaped by context, which reflects the existence of multiple ways of knowing (Krauss 2005). In the workplace, it is important that the view of workers as individuals who experience the implementation of the WSP express the differing opinions and understanding of what the instrument purports to achieve.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research refers to the approach to enquiry that seeks to understand particular phenomena in its natural contextual setting using descriptive, non-numerical data in the form of words to explain the phenomenon. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 1998) explain that a qualitative research design can be used successfully in many disciplines, fields, and subject matter. It is an approach to inquiry that involves studying people, situations and phenomena in its natural setting as possible. The aim of qualitative inquiry is to arrive at understanding the subject of study and be able to make sense of observations and experiences. Although it has dual properties of functioning as a research design and methodology, its concentration is on gathering information that explains people's construction, interpretation and meaning to their life experiences from their own point of view (Gerson and Horowitz 2002, Denzin and Lincoln 1994)

The primary research question seeks to discover the perceptions of employees regarding the usage of the WSP (WSP) in meeting their workplace learning needs for professional and personal development. The secondary questions enquire about the nature of learning encouraged through the WSP. The question wants to identify whose interests are served in the organisation through the usage of the WSP despite the financial incentives for skills development. All these questions required obtaining data from the viewpoint of the workers themselves, since they experienced these learning interventions documented in the WSP.

In this research, the qualitative data comprised of data collected from the primary sources who are employees from the various levels in the hierarchy of the organisation. The quantitative data consisted of demographic information on the interviewees of a numerical nature. Using the qualitative approach enabled the analysis and interpretation of numeric demographic data into descriptive data that was presented in the narrative. This data used in conjunction with qualitative responses from the interviews provided thick descriptions of employee perceptions. Thick description of data are described by Rubin & Rubin (1995) citing Geertz

(1973) as involving depth, detail, and richness of meaning of the data gathered, synthesized and analysed. The expectation for rich data obtained through qualitative research from interviewing techniques, requires that the researcher listen carefully in order to be able to hear the meaning, interpretation and draw understanding of the interviewee's world or circumstance (Miles and Huberman 1994).

4.3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a single instrumental case study methodology because of the nature of the inquiry. The instrumental case study design is suitable for the investigation of programs and practices where the ultimate aim is to understand and improve a particular program or process especially that which is not obvious to the observer (Stake 1998). In his earlier work (Stake 1994) he distinguishes case study research from other research methodology by stating that "as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases and not in method of inquiry used" (p236). The aim of this case study is to understand and explain how those who are beneficiaries of the exercise perceive the newly implemented process of using the WSP as a tool for promoting workplace learning.

Stake (1994, 1998), Tellis (1997) and Silverman (2005) all agree that case studies allow for an in-depth inquiry where the object of study is unique, specific and in a bound system or context. The design of the case is such that it enables the researcher to gain insight on an issue or phenomenon by obtaining information from the respondent's perspective by using different sources of data and collection methods. Stake (1998) further mentions that the information obtained from an instrumental case study can explain issues in cases that have similar characteristics. Although the choice of a single case study for research can raise concerns about representativeness of the population, they suggest a mixed method design to be suitable where both quantitative data and qualitative data are used. The use of both approaches increases the generalisability of the study and provides in-depth understanding of the area investigated. Generalisability of findings is a common test for validity of the research, but it becomes questionable in the usage of case study

methodology. Golafshani (2003) cites Patton (2001) who mentions that generalisability as criteria for quality in a case study is dependent on the case selected and investigated. Application of this criterion cannot be used as a measure of quality for all case studies.

The choice of different methods of data collection improves the generalisability and accuracy in reporting of results. The mixed method design allows for triangulation, which increases the validity and reliability of the data, thus invariably the study. Triangulation is important for reducing misinterpretations and clarifying meaning by using different data sources and collection methods. The usage of multiple sources of interviews and documents is a form of ensuring that the data obtained can be collaborated, thus increasing its external and construct validity (Cox and Hassard 2005, Creswell and Miller 2000, Stake 1998 and Tellis 1997). In this research, the form of triangulation achieved relied on the collection of different data sources and methods. The use of interviews, document analysis and observation allowed for method triangulation that provided evidence from different sources.

Although triangulation is important in research, Cox and Hassard (2005:p121) suggest considering "... alternative approaches to triangulation in situations where there is difficulties in corroboration, inconsistencies and conflict across data sources". They recommend that researchers involved in investigating organisational development choose a more reflective stance that offers an angle or partial view of the situation being investigated. Workplace learning is part of the organisational development discourse through the development of human resources. They recommend that the researcher "takes an appreciative stance of the situation or setting if the whole poses difficulties". Therefore, this position allows for the use of triangulation not as a means of closure and capturing the full picture, but it is viewed as offering an opportunity to intervene in a situation that would otherwise be impossible to understand as a whole. Since the municipality is a very large organisation, the decision to research a unit can pose questions on the appropriateness of the selected methodology. Choice of the design and methodology selected are suitable for the type of information that was required. The

data revealed that irrespective of the department the respondents were from, there were common prevailing issues relating to skills development and training in the organisation. This indicates that even with a bigger sample using the same data collection method the responses would be similar if not the same as long as there are certain conditions prevailing in the environment.

Golafshani (2003) raises another interesting proposition on the issue of validity and reliability and their usage in qualitative research that is more appropriate for this study. She maintains that since this form of research is dependent on the researcher's ability to investigate a particular situation, focus on reliability and validity should change to the introduction of issue on credibility for evaluating the quality of the research. Credibility includes issues of transferability, dependability and trustworthiness for determining quality of the research. Gephart (1999) and Creswell and Miller (2000) concur with Golafshani (2003) by adding that authenticity and fairness are also more appropriate for evaluating the findings in qualitative research for establishing validity. The credibility of this research is discussed later in the chapter in section on reviewing the design and methodology.

Creswell and Miller (2000), who propose the use of validity procedures in qualitative research, support further discussions on the issue of validity and the qualitative approach. They provide a framework for establishing the rationale for choices of techniques and methods used in the research, which can increase the research quality by adopting validity procedures. These validity procedures can include the researchers lens, epistemological orientation and assumptions, triangulation and reflexivity as some ideas of how to evaluate qualitative research for validity.

In this research, the usage of documented data along with face-to-face interviews ensured the corroboration of the information provided which was one validity procedure implemented. The WSP was analysed before and after the interviews were conducted. This was to identify consistencies or inconsistencies in the information provided from the interviews with written information in the WSP.

Interestingly, not all the respondents could recall the learning and training initiatives that they were scheduled to attend during the 2004/05 year.

4.3.1 The Case

The case chosen for this research was the eThekweni Municipality in the local sphere of government. The municipality is located in the eastern seaboard of South Africa within the province of KwaZulu Natal, with a population of just over 3 million. This organisation is composed of various business clusters each with distinct business and service delivery objectives. The municipality as an organisation in the public sector is composed of three distinct structures, namely, political, administrative and community level (Davids 2006). This research was conducted in the administrative level in the Procurement and Infrastructure Cluster. A cluster is one of business units in the municipality. It is in turn comprised of different departments such as Engineering, Transport Authority, Electricity, Cleansing and Solid Waste, Housing and Procurement. The respondents, who are employed at different occupational levels, were randomly selected from the above-mentioned divisions of this cluster. The municipality employs approximately 18,000 workers. The chosen cluster has approximately 6,000 employees divided among the various departments listed above.

The rationale for choosing the municipality an organisation as the case study unit was based on the premise that, as an organisation in public service, they are compelled to submit the WSP like any other organisation in the private sector employing more than fifty personnel. As a public entity, it would not be easy to disregard legislative policies guiding learning, training and development practice such as the implementation of the WSP. Therefore, it piqued the interest of the researcher to investigate the various opinions, from the workers' perspective, concerning the use of this mandatory instrument for promoting various forms of learning in the organisation since its implementation in the organisation in 2003. The researcher sought permission to conduct the research, which was granted by senior management in the skills development unit and granted.

4.3.2 Data Collection

The data collected was obtained from three sources: interviews with respondents; the WSP 2004/05 Document and the Annual Training Report (Record). Hodder (1994) made a distinction between records and documents by asserting that documents texts that are easier to access than records, whereas the latter are texts that are mostly for official use and cannot be accessed easily, and without permission to use the information.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions guided by an interview schedule were used for all the respondents. This form of interview allowed for focused two-way conversation that provided a range of information and insight into discussed issues. Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that the use of semi-structured interviews is successful on topics deemed as sensitive. Researching on employee's perception regarding the implementation of legislative directives from government and their management on skills development is a sensitive issue that required tact and understanding by the researcher of the context in which learning is occurring. The manner of conducting the entire interviewing process and the ambience created became important for providing an environment that the respondents felt safe and free to relate their views.

Yin (1994) emphasised that research using a single case study and relying on a single data collection procedure posed to be problematic especially when it comes to issues of generalisability. He identified six primary sources of evidence for data collection in case study research, namely, documentation, interviews, archival records, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. In this study, three techniques were used in an attempt to improve generalisability.

The advantages of these data collection methods were that documents and records provided stable and exact data that spanned a particular time period. It was necessary to use the documentation because of anticipating that some respondents would have trouble in recalling what had transpired two years ago. The documents served to verify and corroborate evidence from the interviews with respondents.

Another advantage was with the use of interviews. Interviews specifically target the subjects of interest who provide information on actual and perceived experiences.

The disadvantages of these methods of data collection experienced during the research, was mainly in the difficulty in retrieving the documented information especially the records in the form of the Annual Training Report. Securing appointments for interviews with some respondents also posed a challenge. A more detailed discussion ensues in the section that reviews the design and methodology.

4.3.3 Instrument

The instrument was composed of the interview schedule that had three sections. Section A comprised of demographic data, therefore it was compulsory for all respondents. The demographic information included questions on age, race, gender, employment status, occupational category, number of years in the organisation, number of years in the current position, highest standard passed and period when last training session was attended. Although the researcher was aware of the training sessions attended through the WSP of 2004/05, information on recalling last training attended served to verify whether the practice of training and learning through the WSP was continuing in 2005/06.

Section B & C had different sets of questions for the different types of respondents. The questions in Section B were for the respondents who were general employees and who had undergone learning or training in the last two years as reflected in the WSP. A decision on which section was appropriate to administer to the respondent was reached upon completing the questions on the demographic information. Section C was for those respondents who were in a position of influencing training in their departments as immediate supervisors, managers, and training personnel. The same question was posed to all the respondents pertaining knowledge of the WSP, learning and training interventions attended along with reasons for attending. See attached Appendix A.

The use of a tape recorder during the approximately 45-minute interview as well as note taking by the researcher served to corroborate the information on the tapes.

The researcher transcribed the information on the tape recorder at a later stage. The purpose of the research was thoroughly explained to the interviewees and written consent obtained before each interview. It was also explained to the respondents that tapes would be destroyed a year after the submission of the thesis. All respondents were asked to sign a form granting consent for the interviews and the use of the tape recorder. See attached Appendix B.

4.3.4 Sample

The WSP for 2004/05 provided the respondents for this case. Two sets of respondents selected served as the primary source. They were comprised of general employees and supervisors or immediate managers. The organisational structure in this case allows for different levels of management in the hierarchy that have decision-making powers over issues of training and learning. Therefore, two samples were required to answer the two different types of questions posed to them, one set from the general employee perspective and another from a decision-maker perspective. This was important for establishing the overall perceptions, opinions and knowledge from the different levels in the organisation regarding the WSP as a tool for promoting learning in their workplace.

Although qualitative samples tend to adopt purposive sampling techniques, this case required a sampling method involving a combination of both probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling in the form of random sampling technique was used for the general employees because there was a sizeable pool to choose from. After the random selection process was completed, the identified respondents were notified telephonically and electronically where they were informed about their possible inclusion as respondents in a research study. Their participation was requested at this stage. They consequently indicated their interest in participating and appointments were scheduled. Initially, ten respondents were selected to be part of the sample, but only eight responded positively. Section A of the questionnaire was administered to this group of respondents.

Two respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. These respondents were either the skills development facilitator, personnel involved with learning and development in the organisation, line supervisors or managers who approved learning or were in a position of deciding on those afforded learning and training experience. This non-probability sampling technique was chosen due to the limited number of respondents in this category. Section C of the interview schedule was administered to these respondents.

During the research, the researcher discovered that among the respondents from the general employee group, two held semi-management positions. The researcher proceeded to administer questions from both Section B and C since they represented both groups of respondents, and had themselves undertaken training although they were in a position of deciding on their subordinates' learning and training. Therefore, the total sample size was ten respondents, with eight responses for Section B and two for Section C, with the additional information obtained from the two respondents in semi-management positions who answered all the questions on both section.

The secondary source of data included the WSP document and the Annual Training Report for the years 2004/2005. These documents were obtained from the training department of the Procurement cluster. The documents provided valuable information on the nature of the learning that occurred (formal or informal), the types of courses that respondents attended, type of training priority, as well as their duration. This information highlighted some of the learning priorities that are supported by the organisation as well as the Local Government Sectoral Education and Training Authority (LGSETA).

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data gathered through the interviews was transcribed verbatim from the tape recordings by the researcher and analysed using qualitative data analysis method suggested by Siegel (1998), which is a simple model for the qualitative data analysis process that involves noticing, collecting and thinking about things collected

from the respondents' viewpoint. Krauss (2005) highlights the nature of qualitative data analysis as a highly intuitive process that involves a rich and intricate exercise that lends itself to the construction of meaning in a given circumstance. This process aims at forming explanations by understanding people and their perception of their environment, thus generating new meaning and understanding. Therefore, the data was treated in a manner that would allow for the emergence of content rich with meaning.

The quantitative demographic data was coded, and analysed according to the averages in age, number of years in the organisation, as well as the number of years held in the current position. The average of variables different categories was analysed, interpreted and conclusions drawn.

Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the process of sorting, coding and identifying themes as data reduction. The qualitative data was organised and grouped in a way that allowed themes to emerge from the responses, then patterns were established. Explanations on the patterns were sought where there seemed to be common ideas running through the data. Thematic analysis of the data enabled the understanding and interpretation of the data into different logical sections that attempted to answer the initial questions. The themes that emerged involved information and knowledge of the WSP, communication issues, the skills need identification process and forms of learning occurring through the WSP.

These themes of data were organised and displayed in the form of a matrix on a chart, where short phrases and summaries were placed on the chart according to their relevance to the themes. This process is referred to as displaying the data that is part of qualitative data analysis process. This gave structure to the data and made it easier to see and read in an organised manner (Miles and Huberman 1994).

A constant comparative analysis conducted on the data, where similar data was compared with that from another category was employed (Gephart 1999). All the respondents were questioned on their knowledge of the WSP even though there were two distinct groupings of respondents. The purpose was to establish the

manner and extent of knowledge about this instrument from the perspective of the different employees from the different employment categories.

Due to the nature of qualitative data and the interpretivist approach adopted, in the reporting of the findings, the exact viewpoint of the respondents were presented verbatim by using key passages from conversations to support the presentation and discussion on the data. These quotations provided insight and gave voice to the respondent's opinions and actual experience. Some of the quotations are used in the discussion to illustrate the different arguments.

During the interviewing process, observations were made concerning the respondents' environment and whether it correlated with the information that they provided. For example, most of the interviews were conducted in the boardrooms at the different sites in the municipality. This indicates that the respondents position in the organisation allowed them access to such facilities, whilst others respondents had no access to these venues and the interviews were held at their workstations.

The workplace skills document and the annual training report served as an important source of secondary data that provided documented information on proposed and actual learning and training that occurred in the organisation. Content analysis of the document for the years 2004/2005 submitted to the department of Labour (DoL) was analysed for consistencies or inconsistencies in information gathered during interviews. Information on employee's attendance and non-attendance was analysed. The different types of courses described the form of learning in these programs or courses, and the training priority being met. Upon analysing the documentation, questions evolved that required responses from the respondents, for example, reasons were sought for non-attendance in instances when the WSP reflected them as having been scheduled to attend a particular learning or training experience.

4.5 REVIEW OF DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.5.1 Research Design and Methodology

The research design and methodology chosen for this research posed many challenges that were unforeseen. The qualitative design ensures a descriptive, narrative analysis and presentation of the data, which was suitable for the size of the sample. For a larger sample size, a change in design can be recommended for future research projects. A quantitative study using different data collection methods and instrument can also produce informative data especially in such a large organisation.

The use of interviews posed a challenge. Locating the respondents after identifying them through the WSP was not easy. Due to the nature of the work of most of the interviewees, conducting interviews using a questionnaire was suitable but securing time for conducting interviews posed a serious threat to the data collection process. Appointments were frequently postponed due to some emergency that came up at the different work sites. Changing the instrument to a self-administered questionnaire would not have made it any easier because of the time constraints. The actual interviews proceeded smoothly, but there was a considerable amount of time spent beforehand explaining to interviewees that the study was not commissioned by the municipality, but was for the researcher's educational degree purposes.

Interestingly, some information and issues kept intruding in the discussion that had no relevance to the questions asked. The respondents regarded the interviews as a platform upon which they could voice their complaints about the various processes in their workplace. The researcher could not make use of this information since it had no immediate relevance to the study.

The interviews were conducted using both English and Zulu for the Black African respondents and exclusively in English with the respondents from the other race groups. This was an unforeseen occurrence since the researcher had prepared all questions in English. The questions were posed in English, and then explained in Zulu for purposes of probing. This placed extra strain during transcribing and then

translating Zulu into English. The mixing of the languages is a reflection of the current trends in communicating, especially among urban black Africans from a particular social stratum

4.5.2 Reliability and Validity

The issue of reliability and validity for qualitative research is much contested among proponents of qualitative research design and methodology (Golafshani (2003) Gephart (1999) and Creswell and Miller (2000) Stake 1998). Credibility of the study is enhanced by the researcher's experience and background in the field of study. In this study, the researcher's knowledge and experience in education and training increased her credibility and capabilities of conducting, reporting and drawing conclusions in this study.

The use of method and data triangulation was another means employed as validity procedures suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) for improving the quality of the study. This method of triangulation proved successful by providing a cross validation on the information obtained. They also suggested weighing the evidence by deciding on the trustworthiness of the data. The respondents served as reliable, trustworthy sources of information. The researcher was able to corroborate the responses from the interviews with the available documentation. The responses were consistent although they work in very different departments. They had very similar experiences.

4.5.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations undertaken ensured confidentiality of the sources as well as the information provided. Due to the sensitivity of some of the data the respondents required assurance that the information obtained was solely for degree purposes and that the researcher was not *sent by their management to check up on them* (words in Italic are the actual words used by one of the respondents). All respondents required more information about the researcher's place of employment and motivation for investigating the subject matter. This information was supplied to them. This action also reduced the risk of bias in the information they supplied

since it was evident that the researcher was a neutral outsider, not sent by management. All the respondents signed the consent forms granting permission to be part of the research as well as allowing the usage of the tape recorder. See Appendix B for the form.

Accessing the documented information of the WSP posed no difficulty since the document on training that had transpired prior 2006 had been stored appropriately. Accessing the training report was more challenging since it was a very big document that included training for the entire cluster. Interpreting the information supplied by the training computer software also posed a challenge in obtaining the data. The system and the software for recording training information was not user-friendly, it did not provide the necessary information easily nor did it provide summaries in a quantifiable manner. The managers also expressed this complaint when the researcher sought assistance with the records. The training unit for this department provided valuable assistance in interpreting the tables and figures provided.

4.5.4 Reflexivity

During the actual interviews, the researcher encountered problems of reflexivity where the researcher felt that the respondents were answering in a manner that was expected and not how they had experienced the situation. To combat this situation, more probing questions that required the respondents to explain in detail were asked. Data analysis and interpretation is susceptible to the researcher's biases and influences. Interpretations made from the data resulted from drawing meaning for the formation of conclusions. Krauss (2005) mentioned the importance of understanding subjectivity and reflexivity during the analysis process along with the task of the researcher avoiding imposing his or her views. The suggestion is that the researcher sets aside any preconceived knowledge, is open, sensitive and empathetic to the participant's responses. The usage of logical sequence of methods for data analysis as explained above reduced the threat of subjectivity and reflexivity, especially in reporting the findings.

4.5.5 Sample Size

The size of the sample was small when considering the number of workers in the municipality. Even though ten respondents selected for participation in this research might seem too small a sample when faced with the above figures of employees in the cluster. The choice of sample and design allows the authentic and credible conclusions to be drawn from this sample regardless of its size. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) emphasise an important feature of qualitative research as the few number of respondents that constitute a sample in qualitative research. The size allowed in-depth, focused inquiry to comprehend the particular phenomenon or situation of the case. The sample size can be increased for future research to include other departments for ascertaining the overall perceptions of workers on a wider scale in the municipality. Funding would be necessary for such a project. Including the LGSETA as part of the source of data could also provide valuable information on understanding, from their perspective, the effectiveness of the WSP in promoting learning. Are they meeting the objectives set out by the NSDS and the sectoral objectives? What can be done to meet the objectives of promoting and accelerating quality training for all in the workplace? These questions provide areas for further exploration in future research with a bigger sample size

4.6 CONCLUSION

The interpretivist paradigm using the qualitative approach for the study was an appropriate choice of design for enquiring about the perceptions of employees in order to build a picture of actual experiences in relation to envisaged developments by policy makers in government. An in-depth investigation of the opinions of employees provided information and an indication on enhancing the value and usage of the WSP as a tool for promoting learning in the workplace. Although the sample size is small, it is hoped that the richness of the qualitative information provides adequate answers about the perceptions of workers that were investigated. A deeper investigation into the reasons why the employees hold these views

regarding the WSP could have been included in the study to provide a broader picture on the effectiveness the WSP.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The eThekweni municipality is located in the eastern seaboard of South Africa within the province of KwaZulu Natal, with a population of just over 3 million. This region is a melting pot of diverse ethnic groups, cultures and languages. The South African government has three spheres of government at national, provincial and local government which all focus on service delivery to the country's citizens. The eThekweni Municipality is at the local sphere of government since it is closest to the community operationally and physically. The size of the city, the executive and legislative authority of the municipality classifies it as a category A metropolitan municipality. Under the Municipal Systems Act 2000 (Section 2), municipalities are composed of three structures, namely, political, administrative and the community. The research conducted in this municipality was at the administrative level of the municipality. The key function at this level is to provide and deliver municipal services to the communities it serves (Davids 2006, EtheKweni IDP 2006/2007).

5.2 RESEARCH SITE

The municipality, as part of the South African Cities Network, has stipulated one of its objectives that it is to be a productive city. Being a productive city encompasses increased economic growth and activity, high skills profile and employment in the city. The municipality is regarded as an organisation due to its business orientation and overall manner that it conducts its business and service delivery mandate. As an organisation, the municipality is composed of various business clusters each with distinct business and service delivery objectives. This research was conducted in the

Procurement and Infrastructure cluster which in turn comprises different departments like Engineering, Transport authority, Electricity, Cleansing and Solid Waste, Housing and Procurement. The respondents were randomly selected from the first four divisions of this cluster. The municipality employs approximately 18 000 workers. The number of employees, as supplied by the Human Resources department, is as follows for units in which the investigation was conducted: Engineering - 1678; Transport Authority - 105; Electricity - 1756; Cleaning and Solid Waste – 1205. The respondents were selected from the above units.

5.3 DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The composition of the respondents reflects the population mix from the main four race groups in the province. Nine of the respondents were males with five being black Africans, two Asian, two whites, one coloured individual and a single black female. This corresponds with information from the population demographics figures of the municipality where 68% of the population is from the African community, with 20% Indian, 9% whites and 3% coloured (IDP 2005/06). Information obtained from the WSP and the training report for 2004/05, reflects the demographic composition of the sample, where the majority of employees in the municipality are males of black African origin. The number of training beneficiaries in one of the units amounted to 88, with 73 being males whilst only 15 were females. From the total, 50 trainees were black African males. This data is also supported by the statistics obtained from the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA 2006), where in the sector, males account for occupying 75% of jobs in the municipality, with 36% being in the elementary occupations, 26% in semiskilled occupation and 9% in highly skilled occupation. Therefore, this is not a peculiar occurrence in this organisation especially in this cluster to have a high number of males employed, because it is more technical and labour intensive compared to the other units

All the respondents are permanently employed workers with four being from the professional occupational category (two of these have semi management responsibilities), three from the skilled worker category, two technicians and one from senior management. The LGSETA sector plan distinguishes occupational categories into highly skilled and semiskilled worker categories. The highly skilled are senior officials, professionals, technicians or associated professionals. Whereas, the semi-skilled category is composed of clerks, service workers, craft and related workers, plant and machinery workers. According to this classification, all the respondents in the research were from the highly skilled occupational category.

The average age of respondents is between the ages of 25 – 34 years, with working experience an average of four years in their current positions in the organisation. The educational levels of the respondents correlate with their ages and the assumption that the younger workers would be better educated than older workers due to the improved access to educational opportunities in the country. Four of the younger respondents between the ages of 25-34 have achieved higher education by obtaining tertiary qualifications in the form of either a national diploma, junior degree or postgraduate degree, with only one having only obtained matriculation. All three respondents from the 35-44 age categories had obtained degrees, whereas the highest grade passed by the two older respondents was matriculation.

5.4 KNOWLEDGE ON THE WSP

The study attempted to understand employee perceptions regarding the usage of the WSP in documenting and promoting learning and training interventions, as well as understanding the nature of the learning that occurs through the implementation of the WSP. The compilation and submission of the WSP is a legislative requirement that all organisations with a staff complement exceeding 50 employees are compelled to complete. Primary knowledge on what the instrument represents, and the role it plays in promoting and facilitating learning is of paramount importance for all in the organisation.

50% of the respondents agreed that they did not know what the term WSP meant, as a concept, process or document that is supposed to promote learning and development in the organisation. Three respondents had heard the word mentioned informally whenever their manager brought up issues on training opportunities but the term had not been formally explained or described to them. Some of the responses regarding this issue are as follows:

It is a plan to understand the skills and qualifications people need to do their job and if they don't have the skills they go to courses.

This respondent was able to make a link between some form of learning resulting in a qualification and the ability to perform in a particular job. This general explanation does not indicate that they have exact knowledge of the WSP.

Another respondent expressed his opinion by saying that the WSP was:

Just another word that is used to describe training that has not changed throughout the years. They have just given it a formal name now.

This opinion indicates that the respondent has knowledge of the WSP but according to him, there have been no changes in the manner that training issues were being addressed despite the WSP. This attitude has tones of being disheartened and despondent where he seemed to perceive that his learning needs were not adequately addressed. Upon probing, it emerged that he felt he had not benefited from past learning and training initiatives and he now thought it was pointless to complain.

A more informed respondent at a technical level explained that the WSP was :

To increase skills of workers to facilitate service delivery in the council. That cannot happen unless you have people with skills to deal with what is required.

This respondent was aware of the WSP but said that he was uncertain that he had the correct idea about the instrument. He mentioned that one had to assume a certain amount of intelligence about some processes, especially if there was no other

information forthcoming. He had heard it mentioned informally in conversations but was yet to receive information that would clearly explain what the WSP was and how it impacted him.

Although one respondent was aware of the existence of the instrument because his manager had explained it to him when they had wanted to book his training, he was more concerned with the general perception among employees in the organisation who were less fortunate than he was, those who had no idea of how to tackle their developmental opportunities.

What the workers understand about the WSP is that it's called the WSP that is as much as they know. They do not know how much it benefits the whole organisation. They (the employees) understand there is something called the WSP but they do not know how it impacts on them. They don't understand the working of it in the bigger picture but at least they are being trained.

This respondent was aware of what the WSP and its importance in skills development but he could not explain the process involved in its compilation. His own awareness and interest was piqued after he had attended a course that broached the topic lightly. Only after this experience did he seek more information for his own knowledge. He felt that the general lack of knowledge on the existence and functioning of the WSP placed people at a disadvantage because it made them less appreciative of their role in the success of the organisation as well as the role played by learning for improving practice and knowledge.

More discussions on what the WSP produced interesting responses especially from those that had some prior knowledge of what it was. One respondent expressed the opinion of the WSP as just being another policy, which had the potential of ending up like other policies that had not succeeded before. This respondent is of the opinion that there has to be changes to existing methods of conducting skills development training to allow the WSP to contribute properly to learning:

There are policies in place and the WSP would never work with those old policies still there that's the way I see it as far as staffing and recruitment should go hand in hand, you train people to move on.

The respondents who belong in the professional category also had a better idea of what the WSP was because their managers informed them during the process of identifying training programs. This implies that the process leading to the compilation of the WSP, beginning with the identification of learning or skills needs to the eventual selection of the learning interventions, must be understood by all parties involved. As a process, it was regarded as a time-consuming exercise that calls for commitment to the development of employees.

Questioning respondents on how they had obtained information on the WSP from those that had some knowledge of it, revealed different responses, with those respondents having received information from a variety of sources, namely:

- The immediate manager mentioning it in passing when discussing individual training needs for compiling the WSP;
- Through informal discussions with colleagues when deciding on choice of training to attend from the list of courses provided;
- Through electronic communication (email) from senior city managers;
- Through self-directed information seeking exercises to understand the buzzword in the training industry.

One respondent had no knowledge of the existence of such a document. He had never even heard the word mentioned before, but had been scheduled to attend a course through the WSP.

Through these responses, it is evident that there is great uncertainty about what the WSP is, the role it plays in developing workers as well as the impact it has on organisational performance since the respondents display signs of lack of information to sufficiently explain the WSP. Since the selected respondents were from the WSP of 2004/2005, this means that at some point they had been involved in some form of deciding on which training courses to attend. Knowledge of the WSP would enhance a unit's planning of skills development and progression. The process itself is involved and administratively heavy because it requires identifying,

analysing, organising and planning for learning interventions and their implementation in needed areas. In this department, the managers are responsible for this task with the skills development facilitator providing an advisory role. In this case, more consideration should be made on increasing the extent of involvement of the skills development facilitators as the first port of call for skills development in the organisation.

5.5 OPINIONS ON LEARNING NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

Current identification of learning needs and decisions of who is trained and what they are trained for is the sole responsibility of the managers. Needs identification for the purposes of skills development comprises a process where a list of courses offered mainly by the organisation is circulated to the employees. These schedules of courses contain mandatory courses with legislative requirements and generic programs that provide skills on how to perform basic everyday tasks and procedures like computer training as well as more involved courses that aim to improve interpersonal relations skills, such as conflict management courses. The skills development unit usually offers these courses internally. The manager who compiles the WSP supports choice of learning and training program made by the employee from the provided list. Level of consultation varies from department to department. In some units, there is consultation between managers and employees, whilst in other units the employees decide themselves with no guidance on the benefits of these interventions towards improved work performance or personal development. Upon approval by management, the employee then attends the selected training program. This process does not seem to involve employees much on a consultative level.

A question on how the learning needs identification process has changed since the implementation of the WSP proved that there are not many changes since its introduction. The question elicited this response from one respondent:

They might have given a formal name to it called the WSP but there has always been this list at the beginning or middle of the year as to what courses you would like to attend that we choose from.

Another respondent displayed lack of knowledge on how the process of needs identification operates by expressing how he viewed the process:

They come up with a list, I don't know who compiles it, who they consult with among employees or is it something that they decide themselves... I would most definitely like to have input on what I learn.

All respondents agreed that learning and training opportunities were available but they expressed a concern on the scope of choice of programs and relevance, especially with most of the programs provided internally. They expressed a need for more job-specific training required for continuous professional development, especially in the technical areas.

Management decides that (training matters)...for internal courses we are generally asked which you want to attend and generally they are not particularly related to our technical department.

Another respondent mentioned that although the lists were provided for choosing courses, it still proved difficult to do so because of the confusion that existed between personal and professional development courses.

Even though you have chosen the courses from the list, other people don't attend because they feel they don't need it in their current job eg. A general worker who wants to go for a computer application course but they don't need to know that as a street sweeper. Since we now write down its confusing to people. They don't know what more should I write

The suggestion by those whose professions regard it as mandatory to register as a member or associate, made a request for increased technical programs delivered by experienced facilitators. Current learning initiatives are seen as being more focused on administrative and support staff. The respondents from the professional and technical category articulated the technical needs of the unit that would focus on improving proficiency and job performance, as one respondent mentioned:

In terms of actually what we need to make us more proficient in what we do, our needs are not being met, but in terms of getting by through the day the computer courses like MS Word is fine, but there are special needs for this department.

Since managers drive the process of identification of learning needs, the managers' attitudes and degree of knowledge of the WSP also influences this process. One respondent was convinced that his manager was not even aware that there is something called the WSP. A question was posed to one of the respondents in a semi-management position on how he promoted learning in his units, his response was:

No, I don't think so (promote learning). I pass the list on then I decide from there whether it is related to the work or not. If it is not there has to be motivation for why they must do the course.

This attitude of the respondent, in a position of influencing the learning of others, displayed a lack of knowledge and information on the role that a manager plays in deciding who attends courses and why they attend. This response also implied that there still needs to be an educational exercise directed at managers on how they can promote learning in the workplace and what the role of the WSP can be in improving overall worker performance.

Interestingly, some of the respondents were involved in self-initiated learning for qualification attainment and personal development. They seemed reluctant to forward this information even though the municipality was funding their studies. This may be due to the uncertainty of where their formal studies fit in the structure of the WSP since their studies were not included as part of forecasting skills needs for the department; therefore, it was not part of the planned skills development strategy for the department. They thought that only the training done through work was worth mentioning in the WSP. One respondent actually said that he was undertaking "private study", although what he was learning was directly relevant to his work the only difference being that it was through an external service provider after formal working hours. This further elucidates the lack of understanding by

employees of what the WSP attempts on achieving regarding learning and development and how the process works.

5.6 LEARNING THROUGH THE WSP

There are certain guidelines that the cluster suggested for the compilation of the WSP. The departmental training priorities for training included in the WSP follows the criteria based on the following agreed-upon terms for eligibility in training:

- Current job competency;
- Integrated Development delivery priorities;
- Training required for next two possible promotion levels within the municipality;
- Training required for other worker developmental needs or desires of the employees.

When analysing the WSP document for training and learning undertaken, the above criteria was used to determine which of the four criterion for training provision was more prevalent. This would have indicated the focus of training and learning in the organisation. The information obtained was inconclusive because, although the priorities are numbered and they appear alongside the name of the course, they do not relate to the above-mentioned priorities. The priority is not known, refer to sample page of WSP, Appendix 3. Nevertheless, through the interviews it was easier to establish the reasons for training and learning. The respondents all mentioned that the training was mainly for job competency and for meeting the municipality's integrated development priorities.

One respondent mentioned the lack of personal development training in the WSP although another respondent had managed to enroll for a course that was not relevant to their current work needs but it was useful for personal development.

The lack of personal development courses offered is a result of the uncertainty about the scope of choices from the provided lists and to the lack of guidance on

how to decide which training courses to attend and what are the prospects for career development. This respondent expressed a wish to extend his learning into other areas that would not necessarily contribute to current work performance but would enhance growth for future development regarding other job prospects by saying:

I don't understand how open it is if you want to do a course that is not necessarily work something you need for work but something that can help you...because it might be that in your current job its not important that you do it, but in your goals or future if you can gain the skills and can get to move out into another departments or to do other things or another job in the organisation?

Both formal and informal learning interventions conducted in this unit are documented in the WSP. Due to the nature of the work, most of the training has a theoretical as well as a practical component, where employees have to demonstrate ability when undergoing certain learning experiences. The following is a partial list of some of the courses reflected on the WSP offered internally and externally: Computer courses such as *Introduction to Computers; Mastering MS Word 2000; Mastering MS Excel; Ms Project*. Other courses are: *First Aid course; Zulu for English Speakers; Effective Letter writing; Effective Meetings; Time Management; Conflict Management; Assertive Communication; Initiating Disciplinary Enquiries*.

The focus of learning and training programs according to the types of programs mentioned is mainly on skill acquisition for improving work performance. Therefore, according to the respondents, the conventional training practices of classroom-like settings are favoured over more holistic learning practices that encourage interaction and engagement. Departments such as Engineering, Surveying and Architecture are more inclined to encourage informal learning methods through processes like coaching, mentoring and on the job training in the form of structured learning like learnerships. Upon arrival at work, new employees in this department are taken under the wing of more senior personnel until they are able to master the work. A respondent in a semi management position mentioned the process by saying:

We have a task complement of 10 with guys of various degree of experience some with 40 years of experience and guys starting off. So we do promote to intermingle & to help other staff if anybody asks questions within the staff especially with engineering. I don't think that one can actually learn a textbook. It's got to be with interaction and practice of what you doing. That's what we trying to do in our department, we promoting learning through experience.

This form of mentoring and coaching is another form of informal learning that is intentional and planned. Although this form of learning is common, it is not formalized by being acknowledged and documented on the WSP since the informal learning category on the WSP does not cater for the different types of informal learning that can occur in the work setting.

The training report indicates that more informal learning than formal learning was encouraged through the WSP. Informal learning is in the form of practical work done on the job after having had a formal session in a classroom type of environment. Training programs like computer courses required the use of the computer for it to be practical. When respondents were asked about the forms of learning they thought were popular in their workplace, they mentioned that most of the learning was formal, referring to the courses that they attended based in the typical classroom type of learning. It was also evident that the classification of learning in the WSP as informal differed from the workers understanding of what was formal and informal learning. The respondents regarded most of the programs that they had attended as being formal whereas they were documented as informal in the WSP. Therefore, there seems to be a discrepancy in understanding and distinguishing between formal and informal learning. Employees had a different perception and understanding of the forms of learning that occurred in the courses.

Eight respondents who were identified to undergo training in the following course are documented below in Table 1, along with the reasons for attendance and non-attendance. The other two respondents had not undergone any training for the WSP of 2004/05.

All the respondents were asked to recall when they had last attended training; one respondent had attended training in the past three months prior to the study being conducted. Five respondents mentioned that in the past 6 months they had undertaken some form of learning through training programs which would be in the 2005/2006 WSP which was not part of the investigation. Three respondents had attended training in the past eighteen months, which implies that the last training they attended was in the 2004/05 WSP. Only one respondent had not attended training in the past two years, although he had been identified for training. The WSP revealed that some respondents were scheduled to attend more than one training session. No reason was provided for why in one financial year an individual worker would be scheduled to attend more than one training program.

Table 1 Identified learning through the WSP

NAME OF COURSE	FORMAL./ INFORMAL	ATTEND YES/NO	REASONS FOR ATTENDANCE OR NON ATTENDANCE	SERVICE PROVIDER FOR TRAINING
Computer program	Formal	YES	Essential for job functioning	Skills Development Unit (SDU)
Computer program	Informal	YES	Changes of software, required for job functioning	SDU
Project Management	Formal	YES	Essential for improved work performance	External Provider
Presentation skills	Informal	NO	No one turned up for the course	SDU
Presentation skills	Informal	Yes	Was appointed to attend. (sic). Course not relevant to immediate job description	SDU
Computer program	Informal	YES	Change in the software, had no choice but attend	SDU
Project Management	Formal	NO	Hectic schedule at work, more pressing deadlines	External Provider
Conflict Management	Formal	NO	Short notice of training dates	SDU

5.6.1 Transfer of Knowledge

The respondents were questioned on the ease of transferring what had been learnt to their work. All of the respondents found the transfer of knowledge occurred easily especially for the computer courses. There were those respondents who had attended programs that were not directly relevant to their daily functioning; therefore, they had not had the opportunity of applying what they had learnt.

One respondent, who had attended computer training because of a change in software, mentioned that changing to the new software program was not difficult because he had to use it for performing tasks:

I do use it now and again ...I still prefer the old Quattro Pro. I use the other one. It's relevant and very easy to use because I had done the previous one (Quattro Pro) and they are very similar.

The question of who benefited from the usage of the WSP was addressed through analysing the ATR. Table 2 below reveals that in 2004/05, a concentration of

learning and training initiatives among the technical and associate professional occupation categories amounted to 215 employees who were trained. The second concentration of learning or training is by the administrative staff or clerks who numbered 115, with the majority of them receiving training on information technology courses. The respondents spoken to expressed this opinion that they felt the training favoured the support staff, thus they wished for it to be more job and specialist focused. This information partly answers the question of placement of the learning and training priorities of the organisation as reflected by the WSP. Most programs offered were in the form of informal learning.

Table 2 Education and training required to achieve training and skills development priorities during period 2004/2005

Employment category	Management/ leadership	Project Management \ planning	Client Services	Financial	Corp, Legal and Support	Administration	Policy Development	Information Technology	Specialist Technical	Life skills and Basic Education	Training skills	Social/Comm/Econo.dev and planning	Nature of Intervention	
													Informal	Formal
Legislators, Senior Officials, Managers	8								1			1	10	
Professionals	5							2					7	
Technicians Associate Professional	36	2	1	5	0	2	0	32	39	27	2	64	185	30
Crafts and Related Trades workers	22	1				1		54	3	6	2	4	94	1
Clerks	4	1				14		81	2	5	5	2	112	3
Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	2					1		15	6	12	2	5	42	2
Elementary Occupations	1					1		19	2		1		23	1
TOTALS	78	4	1	5	0	19	0	203	53	50	12	76	473	37

Courtesy of Skills Development Unit- Training Organiser 2005: Engineering Unit of Thekwini Municipality

5.7 COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

Employees in this cluster generally belong to the technical and professional occupational categories. Engineers and technicians have strict educational qualifications requirements for practicing the profession. The profession also requires registration with the professional body of engineers and continued professional development. Therefore, they value continuous learning and regard it as an essential part of the acquisition of formal knowledge and skills relevant for executing their jobs efficiently. Commitment to learning seems greater in these professional categories due to the nature of the work that is innovative and dynamic. The expectation on the manner of addressing learning and training needs varies according to the departments. All the respondents agreed that there should be extensive consultation regarding training and learning needs. The lack of participation in the decision-making and the top-down approach made them feel that they had no choices; the lack of control of the decision made them feel less responsible for their learning, thus disempowering them.

The age of the respondents also seemed to influence their enthusiasm and commitment to engaging in learning and training opportunities. One of older, more mature respondent mentioned how he felt overlooked when it came to assigning learning and training prospects. This he credited to his advanced years as well as the fact that he did not have a formally recognised qualification; therefore he was being overlooked for training and learning opportunities. He was also reluctant to discuss this issue further even with some probing by the researcher. His response was:

I would like to go on to my next level of education but they will not allow me...now I just tow the line, don't get into trouble, save as much money as I can for retirement.

One other respondent of mature age also displayed signs of despondency when asked about suggestions of improving learning through the WSP by stating:

I think I'm probably a bad person to comment because I have a few more years to retire so no amount of training now would enhance my contribution

to the city,... better for younger people to get involved through intensive training.

5.8 COMMUNICATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

There is a perception from seven of the respondents that there is no clear understanding between management and the employees on what skills development priorities are especially concerning the WSP. Respondents felt strongly about this and expressed it in various forms. One said:

Management understands clearly about the WSP, but management sometimes has a problem of disseminating information and letting workers understand their role in the process of skills development and the WSP. Even some managers are not sure of how to approach this task because of the interactive and time-consuming nature of the exercise. The WSP is mentioned by the way when trying to inquire about what training they want to undertake.

Although there is this perception of insufficient communication between them and their seniors, they acknowledge the existence of communication but mention that it is not adequate. This perception differs from department to department as well as the workers' placement or position in the organisational hierarchy. A reason for lack of information in some instances can be attributed to the fact that ordinary employees are not privy to some information, especially relating to the expenditure on training and development. The respondents speculated that budgetary constraints may influence the learning and training activities conducted in the various units, but this information is not readily available to employees.

Another respondent expressed the need for more clarity on prospects of advancement linked with learning and training needs identification.

The training is excellent, the big picture is a little bit blurry, people don't understand but sometimes you sit and wonder does anybody care where I'm going in this organisation? I wonder if he'll ever walk up to me (senior manager) and ask me whether I would like a promotion and this is how we will get you promoted.

This statement indicates levels of uncertainty about the extent of management's concern for the employee's growth in the organisation, which is linked to inadequate communication between management and employees. Although he was the only one who expressed this attitude, he might not be the only person in the organisation with these sentiments. He also felt that more consultation between the two levels of employees was required for improving this process.

One respondent clearly expressed the expectation he has from management concerning consultation and dialogue:

A bit more extra consultation with staff is required, spend more time with staff sometimes probe a bit more. Staff generally don't know what they would like to do, where they want to be in two, three years time.

Another respondent summed up the consultation and communication issue with management very well by saying that:

Management from managers right up to senior managers need to identify what is more relevant to certain departments, what courses and what skills are required per departments, and tap on that because at the end of the day we are the Municipality and the way that we perform impacts on our clients and customers. If you have people that are not well clued up, you going to make expensive financial decisions that will cost the council and its all because of poor knowledge maybe not necessarily from staff itself but because they have not been given opportunities to develop.

Therefore, this respondent was of the opinion that it was management's responsibility to ensure skills development in their units and if they are unable to perform the task, then seek more information to enable informed decision-making by employees. Generally, respondents expected greater communication between employees and management for improved needs identification and agreement on skills development initiatives. This implies a more involvement and consultation for the purposes of compiling the WSP.

5.9 KEY FINDINGS

1. The primary question guiding the research on the workers perceptions on the usage of the WSP as promoting learning in the workplace has been answered partially. The data clearly indicates that knowledge on the WSP is minimal to the average worker. Business as usual was still occurring in a few departments without following the actual procedures suggested for compiling the WSP. There are several reasons put forward by respondents for this occurrence:

- Due to the size of the organisation, the capacity to implement and oversee skills development issues is problematic. The skills development unit does not have a noticeable presence in this unit in the studied
- The skills development facilitators are being under utilised and only providing advisory services to the managers;
- Communicating skills development issues and messages from management is regarded as problematic. Poor communication, lack of consultation and guidance regarding the importance and relevance of skills development and the role played by the WSP undermine the ineffectiveness of the WSP as a tool for promoting workplace learning. The use of effective communication methods addressing the different needs of the departments and units is of paramount importance.

2. The secondary questions were also partially answered. The data provided information on the nature of the learning prevalent in this organisation. Informal learning is more common and documented in the WSP as such. However, other forms of informal learning occurring in the units are not acknowledged through the WSP, such as coaching and mentoring. Most training programs are conducted in both formal and informal manners. The WSP template has to be modified to accommodate the different forms of learning occurring in this particular workplace. An investigation where the researcher is directly involved by using observation and participatory techniques would provide more information on the nature of learning without solely relying on respondents' responses.

The question on whose interest the WSP serves in the organisation was not answered satisfactorily. I cannot, based on this data, unequivocally answer this question. Neither the workers nor the organisation is necessarily gaining from the WSP at this point. The obvious benefit for the organisation is through the payment of the grant after the timely submission of the WSP, but on the other hand, ideally the workers should also benefit from skills development which is manifested through personal growth and job advancement. More research has to be conducted to find answers to this question.

3. Criteria for selection in the study depended on the respondents name appearing in the 2004/05 WSP. Although they had been identified to attend some form of learning intervention during that year, some respondents actually did not attend the scheduled training. Reasons put forth for non-attendance of training and learning amount to mainly the following:

- Short notice notification about course dates
- Courses not relevant to current work
- Limited choices available for decision-making on training courses

4. Key findings on the challenges faced by management regarding the WSP were as follows:

- As a public service operation the current format and template of the WSP has limitations for skills development and needs identification;
- Due to the size of the organisation, there exists a diversity of organisational operations with varying activities. Skills training content mainly has a focus on generic skills and not specific skills;
- Compiling the WSP is problematic due to the size of the organisation. Within the municipality, there are other divisions and departments that report to other Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA) besides the Local Government SETA. Depending on the sector they belong to, these departments are also expected to compile the WSPs for their respective SETAs. Therefore it becomes a daunting paper exercise where the aim is just to meet deadlines.

- The key objective for senior management is for the organisation to become a learning organisation. The main challenge that existed towards attainment of this objective was that training was not part of the life of the organisation. Workers and their immediate managers viewed the training function as separate to the daily activities where learning was continuously occurring. Most of the learning that occurred is attributed to the training undertaken through courses attended. Attitudes and efforts of skills development in the workplace focused on training, the concept of learning and developing a learning culture were yet to be fully realized in the organisation.

5.10 CONCLUSION

Information obtained through the interviews revealed that most of the respondents were not familiar with the WSP as an instrument for promoting learning in the workplace. The process of needs identification in the various units had not changed much since the implementation of the WSP. There are limited opportunities for consultation regarding skills needs identification and forecasting. Although there are differences in the departments where some departments have some form of consultation for skills need identification whilst others have none. This has resulted in a lack of interest in learning and training initiatives, especially since the choice of courses offered are limited.

The working environment does not encourage self-directed learning especially for personal growth purposes. A combination of planned informal and formal learning is documented in the WSP. Informal unplanned learning and non-formal learning are not formally recognised and indicated in the WSP whereas a lot of this kind of learning occurs in all the units. More involvement of employees in decision-making regarding their learning was suggested. The lack of consultation and adequate communication are perceived as possible contributors to the perception of the WSP as a being useful or not.

Throughout the discussions, the role of management in decisions regarding learning and training was clear. All respondents expressed a need for improved communication, and better planning from the human resources department to

facilitate the process. They acknowledged that the task of improving skills development was a joint effort that should not be dependent on certain individuals, but should involve all employees at all levels of the organisation. Inter-departmental collaboration should be encouraged.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Local Government Sector Education Training Authority (LGSETA) regulates skills development and training in municipalities. This body is responsible for developing the sector skills training plans for guiding the implementation of training and skills development in the sector. It focuses on the sectors' training priorities and labour market demands for a skilled labour force by identifying and analysing skills growth and needs, monitoring the skills supply and profiling the labour force in the sector demographically and through occupational categories. It also identifies opportunities and constraints on employment growth in the sector. (LGSETA Doc 2006). The SETA also provides the template and the criteria on how to compile the WSP for submission each year on June 30. Upon timely submission of the workplace skills document, the municipality receives the mandatory and discretionary training grant payment for skills development training conducted by the LGSETA in terms of the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999.

The criteria for the compilation of the WSP entails considering the skills deficiencies in the department aligned with the legal requirements regarding skills development and training, meeting equity targets and improving personal development and career pathing of employees. Therefore, whatever learning and training interventions occur in the municipal organisation, they should be in line with these criteria. The LGSETA defines the WSP as the "strategic planning document relating to workplace training, career pathing and employment equity for the municipality, which relate with the key municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP) objectives and to the priority training areas identified in the sector skills plan," (LGSETA Doc 2006:p5).

6.2 THE WORKPLACE SKILLS PLANNING PROCESS

The learning that occurs in workplaces is influenced by various drivers and facilitators present in the internal or external environment, with the intent on stimulating change in organisations. In the South African scenario, the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and related skills development legislation serve as policy drivers for promoting learning in the workplace. The WSP as part of the skills development machinery serves the purpose of providing a structured way of ensuring the practice of skills development training in organisations. Since this is an externally driven government application, it is worth inquiring about employee perceptions regarding its usefulness as a means of promoting workplace learning.

Within the organisation itself, there are internal dynamics that act as drivers for workplace learning. The internal dynamics are a reflection of societal and economic changes that have a bearing on the worker as an employee, as a member of a community, and as a citizen of the world. Since the democracy in this country is still in its infancy, there are still many challenges facing workers. Therefore, through workplace learning the organisation finds itself in an opportune position of providing the ideal environment for fostering development of its employees by creating learning opportunities (Billet 2002 and Matthews 1999).

The WSP plays a significant role in the training cycle in the organisation, in spite of it being a legislative requirement. In the training cycle, the compilation of the WSP occurs after conducting a skills audit, where job descriptions match with competencies of individuals necessary for the various positions in the organisation. These competencies and skills are strategically aligned to meeting organisational, sectoral and national skills needs that have been identified. This stage exposes the training or developmental needs or gaps existing in the organisation or in the job competencies.

An extensive consultative process between managers, skills development facilitators, workers and unions is part of the process of ascertaining the skills development needs of an organisation. When the learning and training needs have been identified

through the training needs analysis process, planning for satisfying those needs with learning interventions through the compilation of the WSP occurs. The learning interventions are designed and developed for presentation as either skills programs, learnerships or other forms of training courses that may or may not be registered in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Some learning interventions are provided internally in the organisation, whilst others are externally provided depending on the availability of competent personnel to facilitate the learning. If external providers are commissioned then surety is obtained on their status as registered and accredited service providers. Implementation of the learning interventions specified on the WSP will then proceed. The WSP along with the Annual Training Report or the implementation report are subsequently submitted to the LGSETA. Soon after submission, the process of planning for skills development for the following financial year resumes (LGSETA 2005).

The compilation of the WSP requires an interactive process of ascertaining potential learning requirements and current skills needs. During the research, it was evident that the immediate managers or supervisors have a profound influence on the availing of learning and development opportunities for the workers. It also became clear that not all departments were functioning in the expected manner regarding the usage of the WSP. In some departments there seemed to be a lack of understanding of the role of the WSP as an instrument for contributing to overall staff skills and personal development and thus inadvertently improving service delivery. This is further complicated by the lack of understanding of the role that is played by the skills development facilitator that seems minimal in this organisation.

Matthew (1999) emphasises the importance of the development of an interactive relationship for planning and decision-making involving workplace learning. She maintains that an increased involvement of employees in planning and decision-making improves their commitment to teamwork and invariably continuous improvement in an organisation that has a focus on learning. It plays a great role in the discourse of the learning organisation and organisational learning. The findings reflect a challenge concerning a lack of consultation and poor communication,

which highlights the minimal role and involvement of employees in decision-making regarding their skills development and the compilation of the WSP. This situation therefore may result in negative attitudes and perception regarding the usefulness of the WSP.

6.3 COMMITMENT TO LEARNING USING THE WSP

The WSP template for local government has 12 skills areas that it concentrates on for skills development, namely, Management and Leadership, Project Management and Planning, Client Services, Financial, Corporate, Legal and Support, Administration, Policy Development, Information Technology, Specialist Technical, Life skills and Basic Education, Training Skills, Social, Community, Economic Development and Planning. These skills areas proposed by the sector skills plan identify the skills shortages and accordingly prioritize training and development activities of the workforce for the entire public sector.

The ability to identify skills requirements poses a challenge to those tasked with the responsibility. In this case, it is managers and supervisors tasked with that responsibility for their divisions who require thorough knowledge of the functioning of the department, its strengths and weaknesses for the accurate identification of the required skills. Darrah (1997) explains the issue of skills requirement in the work setting as one that is understandable through analysing work using mechanisms and techniques that single out the abilities possessed by workers deemed necessary to perform specific jobs. This involves thorough analysing of jobs, performance appraisals and public policy reports for identifying those elements or characteristics that workers must possess for effectively performing their work. Hence, the task of identifying the skills required is not one taken lightly.

The WSP serves as a means of fulfilling the skills requirements essential for optimum performance and productivity in a department or division and subsequently in the organisation. He argues that the concept of skills requirements has the potential of dehumanizing people of “abstracting people from the specific, concrete context in which they work by treating workplaces as a backdrop to their

actions” (Darrah 1997:p252). This argument is central to the standard workplace-learning paradigm that considers workers as a human capital resource advantage and highlights learning in the workplace as acquisition of skills. What is of more importance and value to the organisation is the output and the workers capabilities to perform tasks in a manner that increases productivity thus invariably profits, rather than the concern of the worker as a social being with needs, aspirations and a particular outlook.

This dehumanizing aspect of skills identification calls for attention to be placed on the different aspects workers brings with them into workplaces, when discussion on issues pertaining to workplace learning for skills development occur. This argument on the concentration on skills requirement also reviews the notion of organisational learning which commends individual learning for organisational gain (Garrick & Rhodes 1998, Fenwick 1998, and Valentin 1999). The research findings from respondents as well as from the analyses of the WSP document indicate that learning through skills development programs focuses on skills acquisition for the purposes of improving performance and service delivery. There is little effort in the form of learning and training initiatives that consider the development of the employee from a social perspective. Since the municipality strives at being a learning organisation, a more holistic approach to learning for personal and professional development should be suggested. This form of learning that is influenced and shaped by the context in which the worker finds herself is more appropriate for adoption by this municipal organisation. It allows for the recognition of the different dimensions of the worker as a social being when interacting with their environment. This comment is in line with the holistic approach to workplace learning suggested by Illeris (2003) which was extensively covered in the literature review in Chapter 3;pp28-29.

The respondents’ lack of knowledge during the interviews when questioned about the WSP revealed a sense of being helpless on decisions about their learning and advancement. This is an extreme outcome and a sign of difficulty in establishing an environment conducive to learning especially the form of learning that allows for

the development of the whole individual not just the work related dimension. This situation also indicates that the learning that occurs through the WSP is not necessarily self-initiated which in itself is disempowering to the workers, because they are not part of the decision-making. Argyris (1999) emphasises that understanding the interplay of the power relations and dynamics within the organisation can have a positive influence on the individuals and subsequently the organisations' capabilities to learn. The power dynamics in organisations can render certain groups voiceless and unable to participate fully in skill development activities, thus marginalising them.

6.4 FORMS OF LEARNING THROUGH THE WSP

The form of learning that is common in this setting, as documented by the WSP and the ATR, is informal learning. Due to the nature of the work undertaken in this unit, it is understandable that informal learning occurs. Respondents mentioned that they learnt in groups and used various methods like brainstorming for solving problems. Learning in groups ensures gaining of skills and knowledge that otherwise would not be readily available to the worker. Wenger (2004) refers to the concept of community of practice where individuals learn from each other through practice. This form of learning is contextual in nature and acknowledges the influence of cultural and social factors in the learning experience.

According to the WSP, most of the courses offered are of informal learning programs but in a classroom type of setting. Nonetheless, this type of learning accompanied by a component of practical experience allows for ease of transfer of learning. The knowledge and skills acquired through the various educational interventions currently implemented through the WSP view learning as a product. The respondents expressed a need for more specific training for improved performance and service delivery.

Mezirow (1990) identified three types of learning areas that produce different forms of knowledge, namely, instrumental, communicative and emancipatory. The research findings indicate that focus placed on learning in this study centred on

instrumental learning, which is learning that is task and product oriented and in this case, the orientation is on service delivery. The nature of the work requires skills that enable the workers to solve the different problems that the municipality has in providing services to the community. Therefore, proficiency in task performance would be of paramount importance more than emancipatory self-reflective learning. There are programs that allow for both self-reflection and communicative learning although they are not many. Knowledge from the communicative domain is accessible through some programs like conflict management, interpersonal skills development, negotiating skills. The knowledge gained results in changes that can facilitate self-reflection and self-understanding, and the improving of relationships in the workplace by creating an environment of understanding through dialogue with others.

Cranton (1994) mentions that communicative learning has problem-solving features, but the knowledge acquired enables the solving of problems that have a social orientation rather than a task focus. Here the emphasis is on learning through “interacting with others using language and nonverbal communication in order to understand and anticipate the actions of others.” (p:47). All these forms of learning occurring in the workplace pose a challenge to the employer to balance the provision of learning and training for meeting both personal and work related developmental need, as reflected on the WSP. The information obtained from the respondents as well as the WSP for 2004/05 reflects that there are more general learning programs listed than those that are specific to the different professions. The generic knowledge and skills attained through programs like Conflict Management, AIDS Awareness, Personal Empowerment, Assertive Communication Skills, Presentation Skills, First Aid, Introduction to Computers to name just a few, can be useful to all employees. However, specific learning for performing specialized work is lacking.

McIntrye (2004), when discussing the value of human capital theory on training mentions that when organisations consider training as an investment in their human resources, evaluating the benefits of offering general and specific training are usually

determined by organisational goals, working philosophies and individual requirements. She distinguishes between the importance of general and specific training in the organisation, which is management's responsibility to decide on. General training provides skills that are easily transferable from one organisation to another whereas specific training enhances skills required for performing a specific job applicable to the specific employer and is not easily transferable to other work settings. This is supported by the findings in that the training programs aim at improving proficiency at the relevant levels are lacking. Although, this form of training is more beneficial to the employer by improving productivity it is more costly because it demands usage of external service providers whereas most general training programs occur internally. One can speculate that budgetary constraints regarding skills development training could be a factor to the provision of some of the more specialised technical learning required by the workers in this cluster.

The LGSETA clearly stipulates the NSDS's focus on the provision of scarce skills and improving the quality of training by moving away from training for training's sake. Interestingly, throughout the research, all forms of educational activities the respondents were involved in were referred to exclusively as training. A mind shift on the usage of the term *training* to *learning* in the workplace is slowly occurring from policy makers in government through to the different stakeholders in industry, but the change is not happening fast enough. The term training conjures up connotations of a top-down, management-driven learning interventions whilst learning is a more appealing term that denotes an ongoing process of change, innovation and improvement. None of the respondents used the word learning when mentioning the various educational experiences they engaged in. The concept of learning in the workplace has not taken off in this particular working environment.

A complete mind shift requires regarding workplace learning as a normal, on-going process that is inevitable for development. Hager (2004) provides several reasons why the concept of learning, thereby denoting workers as learners, is not popular. He suggests that there are negative connotations that influence the adoption of the

concept of learning rather than training in the workplace. Being a learner in the organisation can imply a certain deficit or inexperience thus influencing the identity and status of the worker who is in the position of being a learner. There are perceptions that learners at work have less power, recognition and their positions in the organisation become precarious because of lack of some element necessary for effective performance. This perception to learning is a hindrance to the adoption and embracing of learning in a work setting. A conscious decision to create awareness and educate employees on this perspective must be encouraged. This research did not address this aspect of how employees regard themselves as learners, which may also impact how they perceive the WSP as an instrument for promoting learning.

6.5 MEANING MAKING IN LEARNING

The individual employee's ability to learner through the creation, validation and reconstructing the manner in which they experience their reality is deemed an important measure of effective learning. The adoption of the WSP in the workplace signifies the organisation's willingness to provide learning opportunities to their workers. It also indicates their commitment to being compliant with legislation for skills development. Therefore, the issue of the nature of learning through meaning making as reflected in the WSP in the form of programs is important for the perceived usefulness of the WSP in the organisation. At what stage does this instrument fail or succeed to live up to expectations of promoting learning in the workplace? The data clearly indicates that the biggest obstacle to the proper usage of the WSP in this organisation is the lack of communication and participation in activities that enable experiences for creation, validation and constructing of meaning. Communication is necessary throughout all the stages of skills development. This communication entails providing information on the learning and development objectives of the organisation at the organisational structures and levels. A common understanding of the organisational short term and long-term goals and objectives conveyed in an understandable manner is imperative. Learning should be part of the fabric of the organisation and conveyed through dialogue.

Transformative theory thrives on open dialogue and discourse. In an ideal situation all participants in an organisation

... will have accurate and complete information, be free from cohesion and distorting self deception, be able to weigh evidence and able to assess arguments objectively as possible be open to alternative perspectives, have equal opportunity to participate and be able to critically reflect upon presuppositions and their consequences'. (Mezirow 1998)

The word dialogue suggests a different mode of communicating where individuals communicate for the sake of understanding each other's perspectives for the purposes of exploring experiences, views and thoughts. Dialogue is only possible through participation in the workplace (Senge 1990). Implications for workplace learning demand that all employees have a stake in the communication to enable dialogue and discussion and to enhance development by participation.

The notion of participation involves an active engagement by individuals in the daily work activities. Brookfield (1986) explains adult participation as voluntary: This voluntary nature of participation has close links to the ideology of self-directedness of individuals in their learning. The culture of learning in this organisation as mentioned in the findings does not embrace the statement by Brookfield. The nature of workplace learning as supported by the data does not necessarily allow adults to make choices about whether they participate in a learning experience or not. The choices they are able to make concentrate on the kind of learning and training they choose to participate in, but not whether they want to participate or not. Workers decide on the courses they want to enroll for to acquire new skills and knowledge, in some instances these many not have an impact on their current work performance. In this scenario, it is management's responsibility to communicate the role, purpose and importance of the WSP through different modes and channels for meeting organisational priorities as well as for staff development. In an environment where there is encouragement of open dialogue the occurrence of learning opportunities is bound to be more frequent than in other non-encouraging environments.

Self-direction in learning is an important property of transformative learning and meaning making. It entails the individual taking responsibility of their learning by being able to identify learning needs and opportunities. They would then seek the relevant means and resources to address the learning need. Brookfield (1986) and Cranton (1998) both emphasise that self-direction is manifested through the adults' ability to maintain control and autonomy in their lives. This outcome of being self-directed allows the worker to take charge of their lives through the ability to make decisions and choices for attaining specific goals in their lives. The ability to learn to learn is an important element depicting autonomy and self-direction. Since workers are adult by definition, they require support and encouragement in learning to learn. Robotham (2003) suggests that learning to learn is attainable by enabling the learner to become aware of how they learn, determining the circumstances under which this learning is bound to occur or by providing the conditions that would allow for optimum learning to be achieved for them in the organisation.

McManus (2006) cites Sampson *et al* (1999) who adds that the ability of learning to learn in the current workplace is important for deciding on what to learn, how to learn effectively and monitoring and assessing ones own learning. Therefore learning to learn is similar to Brookfield's assertion on what self-direction in learning implies. The WSP provides a platform that encourages workers to take more responsibility towards their personal or professional development. Ideally, the WSP should encourage self-directed learning in the workplace by seeking situations that will enhance their knowledge through engaging in learning initiatives using it as a mapping tool for development. The issue of accessibility of the WSP by employees at all times in the organisation needs to be considered if the instrument is utilised for skills mapping. Therefore it implies that there needs to be a conscious effort from management to improve communication and information sharing.

It is important to remember that workplace discourses control knowledge by highlighting some things and ignoring others, while controlling people's desires and values in learning (Fenwick 2001). People in decision-making positions have the ability and the power to influence the direction of current training and learning

practices in the organisation. Since a representative team of the employee population compiles the WSP, this should not be a challenge. However, management wields more power concerning what form of learning is encouraged and when that occurs. It becomes important for the WSP to ensure that the learning reflects actual development initiatives that serve the employees of the organisation.

6.6 THE MUNICIPALITY AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

The municipality has adopted the learning organisation concept as a strategy for the development of learning as a way of life in the organisation. The literature on the learning organisation relates mainly to private organisations, however it is equally relevant to the public sector. Tjepkema (2004) explains that an organisation that embraces the learning organisation ideology is motivated by a more client centred approach that is attainable through continuous improvement and innovation of learning and change. As a public entity, the municipality has a responsibility to the citizens of the city to provide the utmost efficient, reliable, equitable, and effective service. This is achievable through the practice of continuous learning for employees that is reflected in the WSP.

Solomon (1994:p59) points out three essential changes important for the development of learning organisations, namely as, “a change in the mindset of management, establishment of a creative orientation that encourages individuals to be proactive rather than reactive to situations, as well as the development of an orientation towards systems thinking.” These changes are currently relevant in this organisation. Employees need to be on par with the strategic organisational objectives as well as strategic skills development processes that are in place in the organisation. Systems thinking entail acknowledging the interrelatedness of actions by units that have repercussions for all involved. The benefits of acknowledging the roles played by the different units that constitute the municipality are of paramount importance for the establishment of a vibrant learning culture. Departments and units should not work in isolation. The development of mechanisms to facilitate this

form of thinking through organisational processes and procedures is a necessity for the learning organisation.

The development of a learning organisation is very dependent on the organisations' outlook and attitude on learning. A large investment of time and resources is required for developing and sustaining the learning infrastructure within the organisation.

Dilworth (1996) in his writing on how to institutionalize learning organisations in the public sector believes that a total paradigm shift be adopted by the organisational culture striving for the status of being a learning organisation. The learning culture of the organisation sets it apart from others where there is continuous learning that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of the organisation. Johnston and Hawke's (2002:p33) define learning culture in an organisation as:

Deliberate arrangement designed to maximize productive work in a highly competitive environment where the organisational systems have to be designed to support the development of employees if productivity goals are to be achieved.

This definition is in agreement with the suggestion made by Matthews (1999) and Garavan (1997a) on workplaces that succeed in creating a learning organisation culture by adopting a learning philosophy. They highlight the importance of the workplace-learning environment that has an organisational culture that supports the philosophy of learning. The culture, structure, technology and the employees should reflect this philosophy of learning through the various practices and procedures in the organisation.

An awareness of the possible existence of barriers to the development of a learning organisation is required, especially for an organisation in the public sector that has a few differences compared to organisations in the private sector. The findings support the barriers common in the development of a learning organisation especially in the public sector, which are applicable to this municipal organisation. These are identified by Dilworth (1996) as the following

1. *Treating learning as an individual phenomenon:* Throughout the reviewed literature, the concept of learning has been described as both an individual and social process. The findings reveal that learning is regarded as an individual experience and responsibility of the worker who has to select the courses they choose to attend with the final approval being from management.
2. *Changing the fixation on formal training to other forms of learning:* Fixation on formal training implies a focus on formal modes of learning thus paying less attention to informal learning which according to the literature occurs more often in the work setting. It also has the ability to impart knowledge that is not necessarily obvious but relevant for. As discussed above, learning in participative modes enhances workplace learning according to the WSP the learning is mainly informal but in a classroom type of setting. The respondents regard it as formal learning. In this workplace, the nature of the work provides opportunities for the different forms of informal learning.
3. *Treating business and training processes as entirely discreet worlds:* The separation of these functions does not allow one to feed on the other in a cyclical relationship. The main purpose of training in the business setting is for the improvement of productivity thus increasing profits and subsequently the business grows and improves. The municipality is a service delivery driven entity, therefore workplace learning should be for improving skills, knowledge and behaviour that will enhance service delivery.
4. *Non-listening working environments:* Non-listening environments tend to be oppressive by not allowing dialogue with a dominant discourse dictating organisational life. This environment hinders the development of a learning culture especially in an organisation with ambition of being a learning organisation.
5. *Autocratic leadership styles that “leads to atmosphere of distrust, fear, blocked communications.* The leadership style of management influences the extent of

development and change in the organisation. The organisational culture, hierarchal structure, job descriptions, workloads, communication channels, freedom of speech are some of the variables that have a bearing on how learning occurs in the organisation. Senge (1990) mentions that flatter structures with fewer levels or hierarchies tend to allow for more communication within the organisation.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of the WSP as a tool for promoting workplace learning is mainly dependent on understanding the role that it plays in the organisation. The researched unit is composed of mainly technical staff, professional, skilled workers and labourers. This implies the existence of a wide array of needs that require addressing for improving proficiency in performance. There is also a need for continuous professional development for those registered with professional bodies as well as upskilling and providing of basic adult education and literacy training to those that have not had the opportunity for formal education.

6.7.1 Role of managers and Supervisors

According to the lifelong learning policies, it is the individual's responsibility to identify and pursue learning opportunities from formal and informal experiences (Beckett 2000). This implies that even though the current process of learning needs identification makes the workers responsible for their choices they still require guidance. One respondent summed it up well by saying that:

Generally people don't understand what needs to be done especially if you have to write your desired course.

Therefore, it is the manager's responsibility to offer guidance when learning opportunities are availed to workers. Munro *et al* (2000) and Unwin & Fuller (2003) insist that managers have direct access to workers and therefore have a tremendous responsibility in skills development in their units. They act as "gatekeepers" who control the flow of information about available learning opportunities, they also control the working environment thus have great decision-making abilities. Demand

and expectations on management to perform the key role in supporting workplace learning is very high. Tjepkema (2004) concurs that managers currently have a bigger and more proactive role to play in supporting learning in the organisation.

Their responsibilities now include the identification of learning needs as well as the stimulation and supporting of the different forms of learning especially informal learning that can occur in a variety of ways. An improved communication and consultation process is envisioned between managers and their subordinates. Managers should be more willing to engage the employees in informative discussions for current skills needs assessment and future needs requirements of the individual. Although employees would like to have input on how their learning and development progresses, choice is hampered by lack of knowledge on what to choose and how wide the choices are open to them. There is uncertainty about making choices for courses that are non-work related but that would contribute to personal development and possible career advancement. Managers themselves need to be sufficiently knowledgeable on the processes and procedures for meeting skills development needs in their units. An extensive educational drive is recommended to create an awareness on the potential usefulness and benefits that can be attained for individuals and the organisation through the WSP.

6.7.2 Role of Human Resources and Skills Development Unit

The WSP identifies current skills and scarce skills in the various departments in the organisation. Compilation of the WSP is attainable through an effective communication and consultation processes being adopted. The need for lifelong learning and continuous learning linked with personal development and career development utilise the WSP for planning these processes. More planning and inter-departmental coordination is required with the Human Resource unit facilitating this process more visibly. Future skills projection and the identification of scarce skills in the organisation in collaboration with managers, skills development facilitators and human resource division is an exercise that should be recommended as a priority.

It is of significance that an organisation implements measures for constantly gauging performance of their programs, workers, systems and processes. The development of a formal system of appraisal and performance measures for assessing learning and development is recommended. These serve as benchmarks in evaluating the effectiveness of educational and learning interventions in the organisation.

The organisation must take a holistic look at learning by developing a short term and a long-term outlook on learning strategies. A more concentrated effort on learning is recommended where a strong learning culture is established and engrained in the organisational fabric. Increasing the learning responsibility to the workers under guidance of skills development facilitators is advisable.

Learning must be accessible to all in the organisation – an equitable provision of learning guided by the workers needs. A system for evaluating the progress of the learning strategy at the different levels in the organisation as well as the evaluation of systems and processes is recommended.

The training management software that is user-friendly for measuring returns on investment that can be accessed by managers, skills development facilitators and trainers is highly recommended.

6.7.3 Role of the SETA

The completed WSP is submitted to the LGSETA, that subsequently pays the skills levy grant to the company for the training conducted. There is currently no actual feedback received from the SETA regarding reviewing needs requirements, appraising performance, acknowledging improvements and successes after the implementation of the WSP. A system of evaluating the skills plan has to be developed that will ensure an interactive and consultative relationship between the municipality and the SETA. A rating system with different categories for rating performance at different levels with recommendations for improvements would be welcomed.

Input from the municipalities into the construction of the WSP template is required because the usage of a blanket template for small and large municipalities is not meeting the needs of the big metros. These recommendations imply an improvement in the relationship between municipalities and the SETA that is only attainable through a concentrated effort to increase the capacity of SETA for better service delivery

6.8 CONCLUSION

Workplace learning is defined and explained from multiple disciplines and differing schools of thought. All attempts to formulate workplace-learning theory have epistemological underpinnings reflected by the theorist. The complex nature of workplace learning requires a comprehensive approach explaining how adults learn in the workplace. Currently there is no single theory that provides a framework on the processes of learning in the workplace. The constructivist paradigm that expounds on learning as meaning and knowledge creation by individuals provides a framework for understanding that learning in the workplace occurs through work, at work, from work or in the work itself. The central tenet to constructivism relies on the worker seizing opportunities to learn something when information or knowledge is required resulting in the creation of new knowledge and information.

The paradigms of learning in the form of the standard and the emerging paradigm, use the learning metaphors of learning as a product and as a process that are not conclusive for formulating a theory, although they contribute valuable information on the different forms of learning that occur in the workplace. The former is underpinned by learning as cognitive process that is rational, whilst the latter regards learning as a participative social process where learning is contextual. Learning in the standard paradigm is characterised by reflection in action where theorists such as Mezirow have contributed greatly on issues of reflection and critical reflection for knowledge creation.

Economics discourse and organisational development discourse has contributed greatly to the creation of the theory on workplace learning. The former is through

the embracing of the human capital theory as reason for continued learning in the workplace whilst the latter is in the adoption of management strategies for adapting to changes by means of continuous learning in the organisation. The constant need for organisations to reinvent themselves through innovation and creativity requires incessant learning for all stakeholders especially the workers. The focus should be on creating an organisation that has a supportive learning culture that fosters continuous learning by recognizing the significance of other modes of learning like informal learning through experiential, learning, action learning, mentoring and coaching mechanisms. Guided learning whether direct or indirect through participation, promotes the informal modes of learning. These forms of learning encourage participative learning through interaction with individuals that have a common goal.

The learning climate that is important for the development of the learning culture created should be such that it facilitates and encourages individual learning and self-directed learning. Workplaces that encourage experimenting and innovation find it easier to adopt progressive concepts in their organisations like the learning organisation orientation. The WSP as a tool mandated by governmental policies as promoting workplace learning requires further engineering for it to become useful in organisations especially in the public sector.

Throughout the research exercise, the issue of communication and open dialogue is recurrent. The WSP requires this consultative process for it to be successful. Improved communication and dialogue is achievable through the implementation of innovative strategies and current learning in action methodologies that advance participative learning

The eThekweni municipality as a public entity has a public responsibility to ensure that its citizens are continuously involved in educational endeavours for improved participation and citizenship in a democratic society. It has adopted a visionary policy called the integrated development plan, which has a five-year strategy of improving service delivery. One of the strategic focuses of the plan is to develop the

human capital of the employees by addressing the skills gap as well as improving employability of citizens through upskilling employees to improve the delivery of services.

Therefore, it is important and relevant to appreciate how an instrument like the WSP serves the purposes intended for. The research indicates that it has the ability of ensuring equitable access of learning opportunities if used properly with supportive consultative processes in place. More research is required to investigate the implementability of the instrument for advancing skills and the challenges facing organisations regarding learning through the WSP

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION A

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS (all interviewees)

OFFICE USE

1.1

GENDER			
1		2	
M		F	

1.2

RACE									
1		2		3		4		5	
Asian		Black		Coloured		White		Other	

1.3

AGE											
1		2		3		4		5		6	
18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65+	

1.4

EMPLOYMENT STATUS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Permanent	Part time	Temporary	Contract	Volunteer	Other	

1.5

OCCUPATION CATEGORY							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Senior official/ Manager	Professional	Technician	Skilled worker	Clerk/ Admin	Trade & service worker	Plant Machine operator	Labour

1.6

NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE ORGANISATION							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	19+	

1.7

NUMBER OF YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	19+	

1.8

HIGHEST STANDARD PASSED							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Std 8	Matric	National Certificate	National Diploma	Degree	Honours Degree		Other

1.9

LAST TRAINING PROGRAM ATTENDED											
1		2		3		4		5		6	
<3 months ago		4-6 months ago		7-12 months ago		13-18 months ago		24 months ago		Other	

SECTION B:

THE WORKPLACE SKILLS PLAN

(Primary Source of Data)

2.1 What is the workplace skills plan?

2.2 Has it been explained to you before?

Yes		1
No		2

2.3 Who explained it to you?

Supervisor		1
Manager		2
Union representative		3
Skills development facilitator		4
Training staff		5
Other		6

2.4 Have you been to training / learning in the workplace in the past two years?

Yes		1
No		2

2.5 What was the program? Name

2.6 How was it decided that you would attend or go through with the learning/training?

2.7 What kind of learning /training was it?

Formal/Classroom like setup during office hours		1
Informal/On the job training		2
Non formal/After hours –self study		3
Other		4

2.8 Were you alone in the learning or did you learn with the assistance of others?

Alone		1
With one other worker		2
A group of workers		3
Other		4

2.9 How are your learning / training needs identified now after the implementation of the workplace skills plan?

2.10 Did the learning /training experience meet your expectations? Explain

Yes		1
No		2

2.11 How easy was it to apply what you learned to your job?

Very easy		1
Easy		2
Not easy		3
Not very easy		4
Not relevant		5
Other		6

2.12 Was there a difference in the manner that you conducted your work/job after having experienced the learning/ training? Explain.

Yes		1
No		2

2.13 Do you think that the method used for identifying training or learning needs is meeting expectations on addressing learning and training requirements in the organisation? Explain.

Yes		1
No		2

2.14 What are the suggestions /recommendations on how your learning/training needs can be addressed using the workplace skills plan in your organisation?

SECTION C

Management & Personnel involved in training decisions

2.15 How do you decide who will be afforded learning / training experience?

2.16 Where are the organisations development priorities with regards to learning/training using the workplace skills plan?

Professional skills development		1
General skills development		2
Specific skills development		3
ABET		4
Other		5

2.17 What kind of learning seems to gain more support or is encouraged in the organization?

Formal/Classroom like setup during office hours		1
Informal/On the job training		2
Non formal/After hours –self study		3
Other		4

2.18 How do you promote learning opportunities to staff in your division?

2.19 What are the methods used to identify learning needs of employees in your division?

2.20 What do you think is the understanding between general employees and management on what the skills development needs of the organisation are?

2.21 How is that understanding transmitted to the general workers?

2.22 What differences /changes have there been in the attitudes of workers to learning/training since the workplace skills was introduced?

2.23 Do you feel that the workplace skills plan contributed to the development of the employees?

Explain.

Yes		1
No		2

2.24 How would you improve on the workplace skills plan?

2.25 Identify areas of improvement on the workplace skills plan

APPENDIX B CONSENT GRANTING INTERVIEW FORM

UKZN - MEd RESEARCH

Iagree that I willingly give permission to be interviewed for educational research purposes. The information provided is only to be used for the completion of a Master of Education degree by Ms Thabile Mtombeni. I also provide permission for the usage of a tape recorder during the interview.

I understand that these tapes will be destroyed after a year of submission of the research thesis.

Signatures

Interviewee:.....

Witness:.....

Date:.....

Date:.....

A. Employee Number	B. Surname and Initial	C. Name of Course	D. Skills Area													E. Formal/Informal(VF)\ Excluding Assisted Education	Assisted Education	F. Name of Provider *	G. NQF Level 1-8 (Only for Formal)	H. Duration	I. Cost
			Management/Leadership	Project management/Planning	Client Services	Financial	Corporate, Legal and Support	Administration	Policy Development	Information Technology	Specialist Technical	Life Skills and Basic Education	Training Skills	Social/Community/Economic Dev./Planning							
		Bachelor of Technology : Civil																Durban Institute of Technology	1 yr		
		Conflict Management																SDU	3 days		
		Bachelor of Technology : Civil																Durban Institute of Technology	1 yr		
		Civil Designer Course																Knowledge Base	4 days		
		Negotiating Skills																SDU	2 days		
		Effective Letter and Report Writing																SDU	2 Days		
		Bachelor of Technology : Civil																Durban Institute of Technology	1 yr		
		Civil Designer Course																Knowledge Base	4 days		
		Effective Letter and Report Writing																SDU	2 Days		
		Conflict Management																SDU	3 days		
		Bachelor of Science : Mathematics																Unisa	1 yr		
		Geographical Information Systems																GIMS	3 days		
		Initiating Disciplinary Enquiries																SDU	3 days		
		Interviewing Skills																SDU	2 days		
		Mastering Powerpoint																SDU-IS	2 days		

Training Committee Signature:
 Date:

APPENDIX D

University of KwaZulu Natal
School of Adult Education
Howard College
Durban
17/08/2006

Attention:
Head of Skills Development
eThekweni Municipality
Durban
4001

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR ORGANISATION

I am Thabile Mtombeni, a student at the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal who is currently reading for a Masters in Education degree in the School of Adult Education. My area of specialization is workplace learning with a specific focus on continuous education and professional development.

I am requesting permission to conduct research in your organisation (Services Cluster) that will assist in the improvement of overall organisational performance & productivity through continuous education of employees through the workplace skills plan. The focus of the paper is concerned with investigating employee's perceptions on the effectiveness of the workplace skills plan for promoting learning in the workplace.

There is currently very little documented information on how workers regard the workplace skills plan since its introduction. I have identified this area for my research due to the fact that the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) intends on using workplace skills plans as indicators for assessing the successful implementation of the NSDS and other supportive legislative policies in 2010. The purpose of the research is to be able to form a foundation for more research to be conducted that can provide information on how to improve the instrument (workplace skills plan) with an intention of promoting effective learning in the workplace.

The main benefit to your organisation would be from the report that will be given after the data has been collected and analysed. Understanding the perceptions of employees can assist in improving current practice and processes of learning and training in your organisation. My role will not be to investigate how the skills plan is being implemented but on what the perceptions are on its usage. I understand that the information that I require can be regarded as being of a sensitive nature therefore all the information will be treated in the strictest of confidence and handled in a manner that has been agreed upon by both parties at all stages of the research.

Find attached the semi-structured interview schedule that will guide the enquiry, along with the consent granting form that has to be signed by all interviewees. Each interview should be not longer than an hour.

The following is requested from you with regards to the interview:

- 10 workers at different grades who have undergone training / learning experiences (formal or informal) in the past two years
- 5 management personnel (different levels of management)
- Permission to peruse the Workplace Skills Plan and the Annual Training Report for the years 2004/2005, 2005/2006.

I do hope that my request will be considered favourably. I am also willing to make a formal presentation on the proposed study if I am required to do so.

Thank you

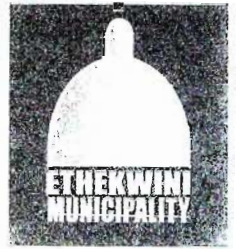
Thabile Mtombeni (Ms)
082 9783 682 (all times)
031- 566 2399

ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY
Corporate and Human Resources
Skills Development Unit

Shell House
221 Smith Street
Durban 4001
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Durban 4000

Tel: (031) 311 1111
Fax: (031) 311 3292

Website: <http://www.durban.org.za>



Enquiries :

Ext :

Ref :

1 August 2006

To whom it may concern

This is to inform that the Skills Development Unit granted permission to Ms Thabile Mthombeni to conduct research in the Municipality. She will commence her research in the first week of August until the end of the year. In order for her research to be a success, I request managers and supervisors to cooperate with her when she conducts interviews.

May I thank you in advance for your cooperation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Mthethwa', is written over a light-colored background.

Mandla Mthethwa
Deputy Head: Quality Assurance



"We care, we belong, we serve"