

ECHEA HR PRACTITIONER REGIONAL WORKSHOP REPORT “Diversity Management”

*8 - 9 October 2000
King David Hotel, East London*

1. Background and Objectives

At a general level, the workshop is part of the project *Enhancing the Management of Change* that is being run by Jane Kabaki of CHET. Currently in its third year, it was started in 1998 shortly after the passing of the Employment Equity Act and aims to track institutional responses to legislation through audit analyses, and to contribute to the development of human resource practices. The last National Workshop focused on the challenge of transformation in response to the Act. This year's National Workshop hopes to go beyond the equity challenges to examine a broader set of human resource demands, and confront changes in the workforce of higher education institutions that dictate the activities in which HR Departments need to engage.

More specifically, the regional workshops are designed to tease out some of the major issues facing HR practitioners that can be taken up at the National Workshop of 5-7 November as part of its agenda.

2. Programme and Participants

See the attached programme.

The workshop was attended by x delegates representing the Human Resource Departments of all technikons and universities in the region (Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon, Port Elizabeth Technikon, University of the Transkei, University of Port Elizabeth, University of Fort Hare, Rhodes University and Vista University).

Sunday 8 October: Dinner

3. Welcome and Introductions: Jane Kabaki and Nandipha Tom

Jane Kabaki welcomed participants. In her opening remarks, she commented that human resource practitioners needed to keep in focus the fact that higher education institutions were producers and disseminators of new knowledge. In order for institutions to fulfil this role, a role that is increasingly important in the context of the 'knowledge society', human resource practitioners needed to think how best to customise the workplace to be responsive to regional needs while maintaining a global perspective. Higher education institutions faced critical challenges in responding adequately to the multiple demands of a new global world order. Ms Kabaki drew attention to the very heavy responsibility placed on higher education by Manuel Castells. For Castells, higher education can be regarded as one of the key 'power sources for the knowledge that will provide the electricity for the engine of development'. An uncritical adoption of business ideology, however, might not be the best way of meeting this responsibility. As Jeff Guy argues in *The Weekly Mail and Guardian* (Oct 6-12 2000), this strategy could stifle the vital functions of the universities and other learning institutions. This posed a direct challenge to

human resource practitioners who used the language and terminology of business and often tried to initiate and institute business practices and models in higher education institutions. Nonetheless, it was clear that institutions had to change and become more responsive to social needs, and human resource functions needed to focus more on development and change management.

Nandipha Tom followed by saying that HR practitioners were in the business of re-thinking, re-skilling, transforming and re-writing the agenda, but that although they were in the 're'-business, they shouldn't reinvent the wheel. It was important to focus on issues of regional significance and ways of collaborating so that HR managers could share some of their experiences of modernising HR practice. There was no longer just an administrative function: they had to be change agents, strategizing and galvanising people into action, and in particular, raising the significance of HR with the senior executive managers in institutions. It was essential that there should be forms of practical follow-up to the workshop with back-home plans to drive the HR function. With this preamble she introduced the keynote speaker, Vice-Chancellor Derrick Swartz of the University of Fort Hare who has been leading the transformation process in that institution.

4. Keynote Address: Prof Derrick Swartz, Vice-Chancellor, University of Fort Hare

A transcript of the speech is attached (Appendix A)

5. Response and Thanks: Dr Nico Cloete, Director of CHET

Transcript attached (Appendix B)

Monday 9 October: Workshop

6. Introduction – Purpose of the workshop: Nandipha Tom, Regional Convenor and Chair

Nandipha Tom again welcomed participants to the workshop and thanked them for making the time to attend. She highlighted three key issues from Prof Swartz's address of the previous evening.

First, we need to understand the institutional, regional, national and global contexts in which we are operating so that we can properly balance the demands of the global against the local and regional. Of great significance here is the current reconfiguring of the higher education landscape, but it is also worth noting that the report of the CHE Size and Shape Task Team offers no guidelines as to how Human Resources should engage with these issues. In the absence of such guidelines, practitioners should be proactive in ensuring that there is an appropriate legislative framework for entering into a variety of inter-institutional combinations such as sharing, partnerships, co-operation and strategic alliances. They should do so, however, in the keen awareness that institutions are not all equally resourced and so do not enter into these relationships as equal partners.

Secondly, strategies should be put in place to counteract the current high levels of staff mobility. Attractive working conditions could help to *retain* a cadre of skilled staff, and creative and flexible practices such as joint appointments, could result in effective *sharing* of staff resources.

The *third* important issue was that of technological innovation. The digital divide operates in institutions as well as in wider spheres and it was important that employees should keep abreast of, and understand the implications of contemporary change.

In her concluding remarks she said that human resource practitioners should become more self-reflective, and unlearn some of the practices that have characterised the past while learning new ways of meeting the challenges of the present and future. Following Dave Ulrich, they should try to become HR champions, strategically managing and steering their HR portfolios to bring them in line with the national vision for higher education. This implied that while they still attended to bread and butter issues, they also moved from 'do-ables' to delivered results.

7. Overview – Programme and Process: Donovan Nadison, Facilitator (CHET)

Donny Nadison gave a brief overview of the processes that have led to this series of workshops. The data that fed into the NCHE and into subsequent institutional three-year rolling plans and regional plans revealed a substantial need to develop capacity in higher education institutions, a need that posed a direct challenge to established human resource practices. HR departments had to develop new plans and practices to respond to this challenge, learning to recruit, retain and exit employees differently, and to foster co-operation.

The first phase of workshops (held in '98 and '99) had focused on national interventions designed to re-shape HR practices such as the Employment Equity Act. This year the focus was on regions and institutions and from this perspective, would return to the national issues.

The objective of the workshop was therefore to find answers to the following three questions:

- What are the major regional HR issues?
- What are the best ways of managing change and diversity?
- What is the context (institutional, regional and legislative) within which this must happen?

The role of the invited speakers was to present cutting-edge perspectives on some of these issues and identify best practices, while the role of the participants was to share experiences in attempting to meet contemporary challenges.

8. Presentation: “The New Role of Human Resources”, Mr Loyiso Mbabane, Economic Justice Agency

In a provocative attack on the general practice of human resource management in South Africa, Mr Mbabane claimed that the kind of legislative intervention represented by the Employment Equity Act and other regulatory laws was an indictment of past human resource practice. Such intervention would have been unnecessary if HR managers had operated effectively to create the broad skills-base required for the development of the South African economy. What we were facing instead, was nothing short of a humanitarian disaster and human resource practitioners must now understand the seriousness of their role: what they had was a mission and a cause, not a job.

In a slide presentation, Mr Mbabane started by characterising the past practices and paradigms of labour control in apartheid South Africa by drawing attention to the following features:

- High levels of state control through a legislative framework that included job reservation, segregation, pass laws and prohibition of unionisation and bargaining.
- A migrant labour force regarded as alien and transient, housed in single-sex hostels.
- Extremely limited employment opportunities for women.
- Rising levels of labour unrest followed by periods of cruel repression.

Human resource management was almost non-existent, and where and when it existed, it followed a narrow scientific management paradigm. Its was often limited to the Personnel

functions of hiring and firing and used either to bash labour or as a buffer between management and labour.

Mr Mbabane then briefly traced the history of the present employment regulatory framework set up to reverse these conditions.

- *The Labour Relations Act* heralded a new period of voice regulation and industrial democracy by legitimising industrial action, regulating collective bargaining, protecting employee rights, prohibiting unfair discrimination and setting up the framework and procedures for dispute resolution and mediation.
- *The Basic Conditions of Employment Act* set minimum conditions for the most marginalised sectors of the work force including standardisation of conditions, minimum hours, protection of basic rights and regulation of overtime, holiday work, and maternity and other leave.
- *The Employment Equity Act* prohibits unfair and discriminatory policies and practices whether direct or indirect. Its approach is diagnostic and prognostic, placing the onus on employers to take action and plan.
- *The Skills Development Act* moves away from arbitrary and aimless training towards planned and shared human capital development. It adopts a needs-based and future orientated approach in which training is aligned with equity, and people are viewed as assets in which to invest rather than as problems.
- New legislation was in the process of being framed to promote black economic empowerment through regulating procurement practices, outsourcing, subcontracting, and tendering and by promoting greater employee share-ownership.

The new challenges facing human resource practitioners included the following:

- The need to strategically reposition HR to make it central to the functioning of higher education institutions.
- The need to have a more than average competency in understanding the legislative framework and applying it in ways that ensured that employee rights were championed.
- The need to become developmental and transformational agents.

Discussion focussed on the need to reposition HR in the perception and practices of senior managers. While often seen as a second-class profession, it should instead be represented at an executive level and drawn in at the start of any processes and decisions that impact on people in the institutions, such as restructuring and programme development. In situations where policies had not kept up with current legislation or there was resistance to change, the legislative framework could be used as an enabling mechanism to initiate transformation and enact the values inscribed in law.

9. Presentation: “Key Generic Regional Human Resource Issues – the ECHEA perspective”, Mr Peter Martin, Project and Research Manager, ECHEA

Mr Martin identified the following key HR issues facing the region:

- Promoting equity in employment practices
- Empowering employees through skills development and training
- Attracting, developing and retaining staff
- Developing policies and practices in relation to HIV/AIDS
- Developing recruitment and selection policies for new forms of employment such as short term academic contracts
- Investigating outsourcing practices

ECHEA could play a role in developing a human resource information system that could be used to develop capacity, to strengthen co-operation in a context of competition, and to facilitate the rotation of staff amongst institutions.

Interaction with representatives of the institutions revealed that all were struggling with one or more of these issues. Problems ranged from a lack of diversity amongst staff to the absence of a culture of learning amongst support staff that exacerbated skill shortages. In some institutions the inability to resolve major governance issues severely hampered any progress on other fronts. Some institutions complained of capacity problems within their own HR departments as well as in critical new areas such as information technology. Skills development often produced the result that staff were recruited by other institutions. Bureaucratic management practices were also identified as hampering the development and implementation of new policy. Participants also questioned whether HR departments had the capacity to deal adequately with HIV/AIDS particularly when it came to counselling staff as opposed to students.

Some possible solutions and strategies shared by participants included:

- Embarking on highly consultative processes to buy in stakeholders to employment equity practices
- Identifying project managers within the existing staff complement to implement specific aspects of legislation and policy
- Promoting HR credibility through visibility – through fostering relationships with Deans, HODs, faculties, unions and staff associations
- Holding an ECHEA-hosted workshop dedicated to developing strategies to deal with HIV/AIDS.

10. Presentation: “Managing Change and Diversity”, Prof Van Daalen, University of Fort Hare

Prof Van Daalen began his presentation by asking where we are as a nation in a context of world class competition. Are we on track to meet the challenges of globalisation and knowledge based economies? The picture, he suggested, was not encouraging. Of the school-leaver age cohort, only 15% entered into institutions of higher education as compared to a 50-70% participation rate in developed countries. Even more worrying was the fact that the student population was declining, with fewer students in the system now than in 1995. Research output was also down since 1994. South Africa was in danger of falling off the map in terms of world class competitiveness and now only came 7th in Africa and 37th in a listing of 56 countries worldwide.

The major challenge confronting us is to develop intellectual capital, as power will go where intellectual capital and knowledge are to be found. What SA needs, he argued, is more graduates to support a knowledge-based economy, a system geared to life-long learning and the production of world class research. Without a growing pool of flexible, well-educated people we will not be able to respond to world class challenges. Brand Pretorius, the CEO McCarthy Holdings, reflects the thinking of business leaders when he says, “BECOME WORLD CLASS OR PERISH”.

Developing the theme of what it takes to become a significant player in a knowledge based global economy, Prof Van Daalen referred to Alvin Toffler’s notion of three waves of technological development, the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution and the current knowledge revolution. For him, *knowledge and information drive the new civilisation*. What this requires is a new, creative approach to education that promotes flexibility and adaptability: the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn. In the transition from a “brute-force economy” to a “brain-force economy”, electronic infrastructure becomes all-important. Levels of connectedness will create new structures of power and although these fundamental changes will cause painful upheavals, social, cultural, moral and political, it is important to remember that computers are not only for rich nations. Prof Van Daalen went on to argue that education, technology and electronic infrastructure are the easiest and quickest routes to wealth creation. In this context, a satellite dish may be a better investment than an extra teacher.

On the other hand, technology alone is not enough, and the significant role that HR practitioners have to play is captured in Dave Ulrich's statement that "The future success of the organisation lies in the management of its human resources". HR must be transformed from an administrative roadblock to a strategic business partner with HR managers moving beyond administrative expertise to become champions of people, change agents and strategic players.

"The message for business people at this Century's dawn, just the opposite of one hundred years ago, is that Management is a human art and getting more so as Infotech takes over the inhuman donkey work – (ox-work) – of the world. Most Managers now seem to understand that they will find competitive advantage by tapping employees most essential humanity, their ability to create, judge, imagine, and build relationships. The champion Managers of the Infotech age will be those who do it fastest and best." *Fortune Magazine* March 6,2000.

Turning attention to obstacles to achieving success, Prof Van Daalen identified two key factors: failure to implement strategy by senior managers, and resistance to change at all levels of the organisation. Referring to another report in *Fortune Magazine* of June 1999, he argued that CEOs fail because they do not implement the strategies that have been so carefully developed in their organisations, they distance themselves from bad news and when they do receive it, again fail to act. Resistance to change, on the other hand, was comprised of a number of components including fear of the unknown, selective processing of information, economic factors, insecurity and habit. According to Kurt Lewin, overcoming resistance to change involved unfreezing individual resistance and group conformity, moving the group to a higher level of functioning and stabilising it at that new level. The objective was the alignment of individuals and groups with the vision and strategy of the organisation.

A key instrument suggested to achieve organisational change was the "Imbizo", a kind of strategy and planning meeting which is held initially at the executive level and then 'cascaded' down the organisation. The expected outputs of the executive imbizo would be the creation of a common vision, commitment, agreement and enthusiasm amongst delegates. It is designed to change intellectually sophisticated business plans into easily understood, actionable goals and give crystal-clear direction to everyone in the organisation. The outputs of the cascading imbizos would be organisational alignment, understanding a common vision, inter-departmental and regional co-operation and the mobilisation of a critical mass of staff support around specific departmental goals and action plans.

Benefits for the entire organisation include the creation of a common vision, with buy-in from the ENTIRE organisation, enthusiasm and energy, coupled to commitment to carry out actions agreed to, and agreement on the measures of success. Action plans would be documented and sustainability ensured by the implementation of a Performance Management system. In this system the focus is on leadership and individual development, with change managed in a defined and predictable way.

In discussion, the point was made that HR managers needed to be bold, to use the available HR software packages to handle administrative matters and so free themselves to become strategic partners in conversation with senior managers. Of critical importance was the development of an organisational vision and goals and then engagement in the processes, such as workshops, to bring everyone on board. The emphasis should always be on development and assistance, not judgment.

11. Taking the key issues and developing strategies for the Eastern Cape region: Donovan Nadison, CHET Facilitator

After a brief summing up of issues raised up to this point, Donny Nadison organised small group discussions to focus on particular topics: employment equity, skills development and building capacity, performance management, policy around sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS, and creating intellectual capital. These topics were all characterised as requiring *reactive* responses, with the exception of the last of these, which demanded a *proactive* response. Groups had to respond to three questions:

- What was thought to be driving or fuelling problems?
- What was the vision of success? For the institutions? For the region?
- What were the necessary action steps? For HR, for the institutions and for ECHEA?

11.1 Employment Equity

This group reported that all institutions in the region were still struggling with different aspects of compliance with the Employment Equity Act, with some more advanced than others.

Core issues to be addressed are:

- resistance to change which was often linked to the culture of the institution
- managing diversity in such a way that staff had a positive experience and wished to stay
- overcoming ignorance of the Act and the non-involvement of senior managers in trying to achieve compliance
- achieving compliance in a context of low staff turnover and declining student numbers
- retaining black staff who used some institutions as stepping stones to other things

Success looks like...

- successful submission of equity plans to the Department of Labour
- successful implementation with organisations demonstrating diversity at all levels
- committed staff, secure in the knowledge that there are prospects for their own development and advancement

Plans and strategies at an institutional level:

- become more responsive and act as strategic partners in the management of institutions
- implement performance management systems and reward managers for achievements in advancing equity
- change culture by performing an educative role in raising awareness and promoting diversity
- increase staff skills by offering scholarships, employment opportunities (such as development posts and internships) and rotation of jobs

Expectations for action at regional and national levels:

Regional (to be advanced through ECHEA):

- encourage further co-operation and discourage competition e.g. through exploring joint appointments
- co-ordinate action such as organising workshops to tackle issues of common concern (capacity building, etc)
- keep a database of HR developments in the region

National (to be advanced through CHET):

- to get a SAUVCA directive to encourage VCs and Human Resource Directors to attend workshops on equity, including the planned HR national workshop
- to use the national workshop to get regions working together on actual plans (tackling national issues regionally)
- to look at best practice through case histories of developments on individual campuses

11.2 Performance Management

Core issues:

- defining performance management - is it a punitive measure or developmental and motivational?
- introducing it into a community that lacks vision or is resistant
- winning commitment

Success looks like....

- high quality output from employees
- an implemented PMS throughout the entire organisation
- support evidenced by confident employees performing at high level -100% support and shared vision

Strategies:

- sell the idea (top down, or bottom up?)
- become implementation champions
- sensitise individuals

Action plan:

- build in incentives and recognition for actions taken by individuals, such as conference attendance
- develop a commitment in institutions to implementing a performance management system
- at a regional level, ECHEA should co-ordinate and facilitate workshops
- at a national level, CHET should put together ideas from regions on a national agenda and co-ordinate information sharing

11.3 HIV/AIDS

Core issues:

- drafting a regional document on HIV/Aids status in Eastern Cape HE
- developing rigorous Aids awareness strategies, regionally and institutionally

Success looks like:

- managerial commitment
- funding for HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and policies
- drafting a regional document on HIV/Aids status in Eastern Cape HE
- implementation of Aids awareness strategies, regionally and institutionally

Strategies:

- develop an unambiguous understanding of the relationship between HIV and AIDS
- monitor HIV/AIDS cases through a quarterly statistical analysis
- draft a working document of policies and practices, based on input and cooperation from all institutions in the region
- run regional awareness campaigns
- develop structured strategies based on consultation, sensitivity and awareness which bring about tangible results

Expectations of action at regional and national levels:

- facilitation of workshops and seminars
- initiation of relations between regional institutions and Dept. of Health
- funding and resource planning
- discussion of status of national policy at the national workshop

11.4 Building Skills and Capacity

Core issues:

- creating career-paths for, and development of individuals
- multi-skilling to retain people
- preparing for people for employment beyond the confines of the job (either in the institution or outside)
- overcoming self-interest and fear in supervisors who may inhibit the progression of employees with potential
- generating support from management

Success looks like...

- highly motivated individuals with a sense of being valued
- increased efficiency and effectiveness
- a multi-skilled institution

Strategies:

- share information through an ECHEA newsletter
- appoint and share a skills development facilitator
- develop a database of skills through ECHEA to be utilised by institutions in need
- plan actions and attach responsibilities
- get equity officers and skills development facilitators to talk to each other

Expectations:

- develop benchmarks for the region against which institutions can measure themselves
- discover through the national workshop how others are dealing with these issues

11.5 Fostering Intellectual Capital

Core issues:

- challenge for the future is to provide intellectual capital for the Nation
- need to be more proactive in strategy formulation

Strategies:

- regions must be locus of the strategies to attract intellectual capital retain it
- need to develop flexible policies, such as appointing staff on half salaries and allowing them to do private work
 - Strategic planning in facilities provision

12. Summary and Closure: Nandipha Tom

Nandipha Tom proposed setting up a team to put into action the ideas and proposals generated at the workshop. After some discussion it was decided to have representatives from each of the institutions with Nandipha as convenor and Peter Martin co-ordinating through ECHEA. Ms Tom went on to thank all the participants for their contributions which would be taken forward in the region and to the national workshop.