

Focus: Human resource policies



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Lifelong learning and reconstruction *can it deliver?*

The ANC and COSATU have proposed a radical new approach to education and training in SA. These proposals are a central part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme* (the RDP). ANDRE KRAAK** argues there are problems in these proposals which urgently need debate.

The ANC/COSATU proposals seek to establish:

- a unified and integrated education and training system, with a strong commitment to lifelong learning;
- a competency-based modular curriculum framework;
- active labour market policies.

The ANC and COSATU propose an integrated education and training (ET) system to overcome two problems associated with the apartheid era. Firstly, in the past, vocational courses have been too narrowly defined and task-specific. They excluded the broad general knowledge elements such as literacy and numeracy. A second-class vocational track alongside the more prestigious academic track reinforced the race and class inequalities already inherent in apartheid South Africa.

Secondly, academic courses at school in the past were far removed from the conditions under which people worked. For example,

* These proposals are outlined in three key documents: *The Reconstruction and Development Programme, a Policy Framework for Education and Training, and the Industrial Strategy Project*



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school curricula have had little understanding of how changing technologies and employment patterns affect workers' lives.

These obstacles can be overcome by integrating formal schooling with vocational training. The ANC and COSATU have proposed a system of 'lifelong learning' spanning both education and training and school and post-school learning. This system will entail a modular form of progression from one skill level to the next. Certificates for all learning will be issued by a single qualifications authority. This certification structure will have the explicit aim of maximising learners' mobility between and within differing ET institutions. For example, as COSATU has forcefully argued, even a street sweeper should be able to progress through the entire ET system to the level of production engineer. Clearly, such a model has enormous implications for the skilling and empowerment of the working class.

Competency

This system of modular progression through the education system is entirely dependent on a competency-based curriculum.

'Competency' can be defined in the following way:

"Competency-based training is concerned with the attainment and demonstration of specified skills, knowledge and attitudes to minimum industry specified standards rather than with an individual's achievement relative to that of others in a group" (NTB/HSRC, 1985).

The above definition highlights two central features of competency-based systems of learning. Assessment is based on the demonstration of specific skills, for example, the ability to operate a machine. It is different from current school testing which assesses an individual's ability in relation to that of others.

With competency-based models, learners are declared either competent or non-competent. Those declared non-competent are provided with the opportunity of repeating the learning cycle. They may attain competence at a later stage. This model is seen as fairer,

enabling all learners to attain competency and, inevitably, producing a more highly qualified workforce.

Competency models are based in industry 'standards'. They specify the nature of the particular tasks to be performed. Standards, as currently defined, are:

- based on actual job or task performance needs;
- approved by employers;
- known to trainees and their supervisors; and
- attainable by all trainees who meet pre-training selection criteria (NTB/HSRC, 1985).

Competency-based learning methods provide important opportunities for workers to progress on a modular fashion through the ET system. At the same time, they pose serious problems. These will be dealt with later.

Active labour markets

The progression of workers along this modular ET ladder is increased by the implementation of 'active' labour market policies. Active labour markets have four important features:

- continuous skill formation and lifelong learning;
- broad ET to enable maximum mobility across differing employment sectors;
- the reduction of unemployment through retraining and job placement programmes; and
- the reduction of race-, class- and gender-based labour market discrimination.

Active labour markets can only be implemented by an interventionist state and through social contract arrangements between the state, capital and labour. They are therefore different from passive labour market strategies which are reliant on market forces and, to a lesser extent, on the payment of unemployment benefits to workers affected by economic downturns.

Radical reform

Lifelong learning policies have the potential to massively upskill and empower the South African workforce. They can therefore be

considered as radical reform, in the sense outlined by various contributors to the *SA Labour Bulletin* (see endnotes).

These potentially radical gains are, however, not guaranteed. Serious obstacles lie in the path to their success. They will only be overcome through effective political struggle. The discussion below will highlight five serious problems likely to limit the success of the 'lifelong learning' strategies in the RDP.

Problem no 1: The myth of 'lifelong' occupational mobility

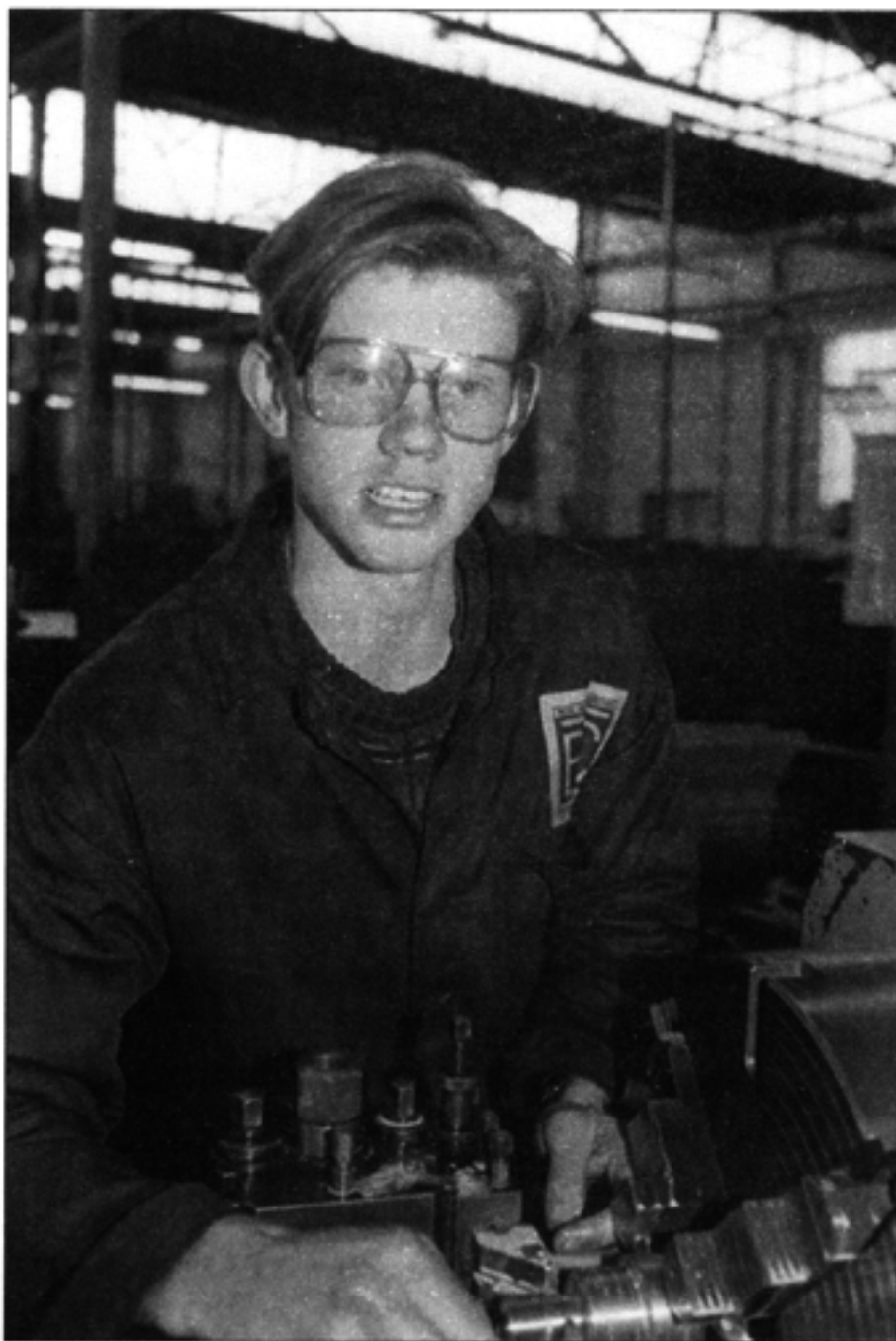
Associated with lifelong learning is the myth that all workers at all occupational levels will be able to progress up the occupational ladder if they acquire higher skills. This is simply not true, and rhetoric which argues so has the potential to create false expectations among workers and students. In reality, all economic systems, be they capitalist or socialist, require a hierarchical division of labour. This is

because for every highly skilled specialist, a much larger number of less skilled workers is required.

Despite this limitation, lifelong learning is essential to the task of radically restructuring the organisation of work. It will equip hundreds of thousands of workers with skills which they currently do not have, for example, literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and information technology skills. These workers will become more multi-skilled, although they may not always shift to a higher occupational level. Their training may be important simply in terms of greater productivity at existing occupational levels. Work organisation should be democratically restructured so as to make full use of workers' new capabilities – for example, through teamwork and other participative forms of work organisation. Given higher productivity levels, these workers may accrue substantial rewards through wage increases and other benefits, although their occupational status may not change.

Of course, certain groupings of workers will shift from one occupational level to another as a result of further ET. However, this is likely to occur only in strategically important occupational places. In South Africa, this will entail the upgrading of black operatives to artisanal level and the upgrading of black artisans to technician level. In addition, a certain number of blacks who acquire higher qualifications will move up the job ladder, especially into the professional occupations. Nonetheless, these changes will not apply to the entire workforce.

The impact of lifelong learning will not only be constrained vertically, by the division of labour. It will also be constrained horizontally across the differing economic sectors. Most of the skills upgrading mentioned above is likely to take place in manufacturing, and within urban areas. Different education and training policies will be required to resolve the problems of the informal and rural economies – poverty and high levels



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of unemployment. The priority will be to train people in sustainable self-employment and collective production activities. This will certainly improve their skills, but to a lower level than workers in manufacturing.

A further essential change in the re-organisation of work is a significant reduction in wage differentials between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Pay differences in SA are far greater than those in other countries at an equivalent stage of economic development. However, a levelling of the pay structure will not eliminate the hierarchy of jobs, although it might appear to be flatter. The limitation on the number of employment positions higher up the ladder will remain.

Problem no 2: The dangers of competency models

A further problem facing the ANC/COSATU model of lifelong learning is its support for 'competency-based' methods of curriculum design. Competency models internationally are highly controversial, and in South Africa, such an approach is likely to meet with substantial opposition from both academics and teachers in formal education.

Opposition is likely to be based on fears that narrow competency-driven modular curricula will be imposed on education, thereby inhibiting the creative learning process. Competency models assume that all learning activities can be compartmentalised into separate units, which can then be learnt consecutively, one unit after the other. However, this fragmentation of knowledge has the danger of excluding imagination, creativity and innovation – qualities which cannot easily be measured in quantifiable units, but which are central to a good general education.

Let us use the example of a cyclist. A cyclist never learns separately to incline the body, to turn the wheel, to press the pedals, and to judge how to lean the bike. All this happens in a co-ordinated whole. A complex skill involves elements, none of which can be defined independently of the rest.

Within the industrial sector, competency-based training methods are fairly widespread.

In most cases, such training is very narrow, trapping workers into highly task-specific roles. Competency becomes a very convenient tool for cost-conscious employers, who eagerly apply it to the task of deskilling artisanal labour.

This critique poses a substantial challenge for the ANC and COSATU. Competency models are problematic on two fronts: they are highly resource-intensive and costly (each modular unit requires a curriculum), and their capacity to promote learning is questionable. The drafters of the ANC/COSATU policy are aware of these problems, yet they defend lifelong learning on the grounds that their approach involves a *broad* interpretation of competency – one which provides both a sound general education and vocationally specific skills.

Unfortunately, the real test of the broadness or narrowness of the ANC/COSATU model will only be known once such a system has been implemented – and this may be too late. By this stage, a number of pressures may have been exerted on the system, possibly reshaping its entire character. These pressures could include a cost-conscious state, narrow employer approaches to competency and a legacy of rote-learning in school and industrial training classrooms. Each of these factors may cement future tendencies towards *narrow* competency approaches.

The debate around competency needs to be opened up. A new approach which retains the obvious benefits of modular progression but which puts in place a different form of curriculum design, should be formulated. It would be a tragedy if the current education system, which has failed to develop to the full the intellectual capacities of the majority of people in this country, is replaced by a system destined to do further damage.

Problem no 3: Misreading capital's motives

Much of the enthusiasm for the RDP, and lifelong learning in particular, is based on the assumption that employers will implement the changes agreed to in tripartite forums. In fact,

negotiations around lifelong learning and active labour markets have already reached a surprising degree of consensus (especially in the 1993 Task Team of the National Training Board). However, it would be politically unwise to assume that this consensus at the negotiating table will lead to effective changes on the ground. South African employers will resist many of these measures, particularly the higher costs involved in developing human resources and the linking of continuous skill formation to the upgrading of workers and the payment of higher wages.

South African employers have a long history of neglecting human resources development. Their approach to education and training has been characterised by:

- A poor style of managerial leadership which has failed to understand the rapid pace of socio-economic and technological change.
 - A managerial style informed only by the need for short-term profits, and lacking any long-term perspective. Skills development has suffered as a result of this shortsightedness.
 - Very little internal training, with employers poaching skilled labour from competing companies.
 - No tradition of co-operation between employers and the state (unlike training partnerships in the advanced economies).
 - Authoritarian forms of work organisation.
- Capital's capacity to resist the RDP and lifelong learning reforms will depend on the democratic state's commitment to radical reform, and civil society's strength and ability to reshape the face of industry in a future South Africa. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to educate the mass of workers, teachers and other citizens who still do not understand the complexities of the lifelong learning models. With mass support, it may be possible to ensure a more progressive implementation of these policies. The past tendency to formulate policy models in small forums without the support and informed understanding of key social actors is unlikely to generate the political clout necessary to overcome capital's reluctance for reform.

Problem no 4: The risk of entrenching existing inequalities

Advocates of lifelong learning and a more export-oriented manufacturing sector rely heavily on the assumption that the South African economy has exhausted the economic benefits of fordist methods of production and is now on the verge of a transition to post-fordism. Fordism is an economic system characterised by mass consumer markets, mass production techniques, mechanised assembly lines, authoritarian management and fragmented work.

In contrast, post-fordism is characterised by niche markets (using the car industry, these would be specialised markets in, for example, family cars, the executive car, the sports car and the working woman's car), the new computer-based technologies (computer-integrated manufacturing, CNC machines and robotics) and the more participatory forms of work organisation (multi-skilling, teamwork, quality circles, Just-In-Time). ANC and COSATU policy positions are influenced by the belief that some of South Africa's most critical problems can be addressed by post-fordist forms of industrial organisation.

These assumptions are contentious. Firstly, fordist methods have never constituted the dominant form of production in South African manufacturing. Rather, they co-exist alongside other forms of production, for example 'jobbing'. Here the factory floor is organised around the production of one-off contracts with short-runs, often entailing complex manufacturing and engineering processes. Also, many small manufacturing plants in South Africa are organised around simple technologies, with the family structure providing the labour force.

Secondly, it cannot be said that fordism (assembly line production) in South Africa is on the decline. These mass production methods only emerged in South Africa as late as the 1960s and 1970s. Given such a short lifespan, it is too early to deduce that fordist methods of production have been fully exhausted. With the current political changes, there is likely to be an expansion of markets



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for locally produced goods. This will in turn renew the prospects for mass production. Increased demand for manufactured goods will come from the emergent black middle class and from new markets opening up in Africa.

Thirdly, it cannot be said with any certainty that South Africa has begun the transition to post-fordism. In the international context, a transition to post-fordism in most cases has affected only parts (most often the strategic export manufacturing sectors) of national economies. In South Africa, the evidence suggests that while CAD and CNC technologies have been introduced into the South African manufacturing sector, particularly by 'leading-edge' multi-national corporations, evidence of computer-integrated manufacturing is very remote.

In general, it seems as if the diffusion of the new technologies and new managerial techniques has been gradual and piecemeal, without significant changes to the hierarchical and racist forms of work organisation. Some writers have even suggested that South Africa has entered a transition to neo-fordism —

involving the intensification of the current forms of exploitation with the aid of computerised technology. This has occurred primarily because South African capital is still trapped within a fordist mind-set of seeking to maintain maximum control over labour.

A final problem with the debate about post-fordism is the way in which it has reshaped the meaning of 'growth through redistribution'. Initially, 'growth through redistribution' was conceptualised as a single and unified strategy with two aims: that industry meet basic needs, and that industry adapt to the competitive requirements of the global economy. However, the emphasis on post-fordism has had the effect of giving the restructuring of export industry greater importance at the expense of industry producing for the local market and the rural and informal sectors. As a result, there now exists the possibility that existing economic inequalities — between the developed urban areas and the underdeveloped rural and informal sectors — may be increased by the industrial policies being pursued by the ANC and COSATU.

The Industrial Strategy Project has been most influential in the debates about post-fordism and economic growth. They argue that developing export capacity must be based on the following central pillars:

- the promotion of higher value-added production (adding value to raw materials via new technology and increased skills);
- the introduction of Japanese-inspired forms of participatory work organisation;
- multi-skilling; and
- the development of indigenous technological capacity (Joffe et al, 1993).

These are 'high-skill/high-tech' industrial policy principles associated with post-fordism. However, if we return to the 'redistributive' thrust of 'growth through redistribution' – such as the mass provision of houses, electricity and basic foodstuffs – these all entail fairly labour-intensive production processes reliant on simpler skills and technologies. Again, the threat exists that the inequality between urban and rural areas is amplified and not reduced.

Clearly, what is now urgently required are differentiated economic policies which aim to simultaneously develop the rural economy, provide opportunities for the urban unemployed, and ensure that South Africa is indeed competitive on global markets. While recognising that the new technologies and new forms of work organisation are essential to the success of export-oriented sectors of manufacturing, an over-reliance on post-fordist methods will not assist the process of reducing sectoral inequality in the South African economy.

Problem no 5: Lack of comprehensive planning

An important feature of ANC and COSATU ET policy proposals is an emphasis on *comprehensive planning*, an approach which contrasts sharply with the ad-hoc nature of past policy implementation. This principle has substantial significance for the RDP. Policy planning in one sector should be informed by, and synchronise well with, policy initiatives in other key sectors.

For example, it would be pointless to upgrade the skills of workers via the ET system

if employers did not agree to the re-organisation of work. Current forms of work organisation do not maximise the creative and innovative potential of workers. Rather, they maximise employer control. Similarly, if labour market policies do not change, an increase in skills amongst the disadvantaged will not necessarily result in large-scale occupational mobility. This is because of the gross inequalities which characterise the labour market – along race, class and gender lines.

Also, it would be a futile exercise if economic planning determined the nature of youth training schemes and public works programmes without sufficient regard for the pre-requisites of entry into the ET system. Poor quality training in such schemes will not be recognised by the ET institutions and will not benefit the trainees in the long run.

Finally, training youths in schemes without the security of long-term employment may merely increase their frustrations and anger. Many such schemes have failed dismally in other countries. Success has only been achieved through consensual and highly co-ordinated arrangements between all key social partners – business, labour, the state and the ET institutions.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a trend towards the same ad-hoc policy implementation in the new South Africa as in the old SA. The ANC has launched a massive drive to build a million homes in the next five years. This could provide the foundation for the most impressive upgrading of worker education and training capabilities. However, there seems to be little thought about the training implications. Housing planners are ignoring the importance of linking training into the formal ET system. A similar criticism can be made of the public works programmes emanating from the national Economic Forum and of the Joint Enrichment Project's youth training schemes.

Perhaps the most problematic of all has been the small grouping of ANC and COSATU economic planners, who over the past number of years have developed complex economic policies. These have touched on issues such as value-added exports, new technologies,

enhanced indigenous technological capacity, the development of micro enterprises and co-operative agriculture. However, they have paid scant attention to the human resources required to realise these economic goals.

This tendency is alarming because it has the effect of surrendering the important task of improving skills to the dictates of market forces. Again, it must be stressed that economic growth in the global context of the 1980s and 1990s only materialised in those economies founded on co-ordinated markets and comprehensive planning (for example Germany, Sweden and to a lesser extent, the Pacific rim countries) rather than in those societies based purely on free market principles (England, for example). The central concern here, then, is that we may fall far short of a progressive and successful form of social democracy, which requires co-ordinated and comprehensive planning. Our future may be shaped primarily by market forces.

The way forward

Although the package of lifelong learning policies contained in the RDP represent the most coherent proposals for reconstructing education in South Africa to date, a number of serious problems exist, especially in relation to lifelong learning. The ANC and COSATU will need to undertake further intensive policy work and do extensive lobbying and consulting with their political allies to ensure that lifelong learning attains its full progressive potential. Most important among these tasks is to:

- Develop economic and educational policies which recognise the unevenness between economic sectors and which ensure that social resources are redistributed from advantaged economic sectors to those which face economic impoverishment
- Win support for lifelong learning from key constituencies in education and industry, and engage capital in negotiations about lifelong learning from a position of strength
- Investigate ways in which the obvious mobility benefits of lifelong learning can be retained without the use of narrow competency models.



Lifelong learning: will it give workers new jobs, new hopes ?

- Develop realistic proposals with regard to career progression – proposals which acknowledge the limits on mass upward mobility.
- Plan all social policies *comprehensively* so that, taken together, they ensure increased social equality and economic growth. In isolation of such an approach, individual policies will represent mere ad-hoc tinkering with insignificant levels of social change taking place. *FB*

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Affirmative action *tokenism or transformation?*



Debate around affirmative action has accelerated with recent political changes in South Africa. Unions and employers, and the state itself, are beginning to take affirmative action more seriously.

DEANNE COLLINS discusses the different perspectives.



“We knew if we didn’t start early enough on our own to promote more blacks into skilled and management positions it would be forced on us” – manager

“Affirmative action is not about promotion of a few individuals out of the shop floor, but about workplace democracy involving all of the workers” – trade unionist

Current realities

Affirmative action refers to a set of procedures aimed at proactively addressing the disadvantages experienced by sections of the community in the past. South Africa is a society characterised by complex social stratification. Deep class divisions are compounded by racial and gender distinctions. A mere 2% of private sector assets are owned by black people. It is estimated that, at current rates of accumulation, it will be 100 years before black people own half the shares listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Less than 3% of managers in South Africa are black, with a minuscule proportion of these being women. Even in the informal sector – widely portrayed as the hub of black economic activity – African owners control only 40% of all enterprises.

The public sector is an excellent example of just how effective affirmative action can be. The National Party used the civil service to create jobs for its (largely) white male Afrikaner supporters. Whites occupy 41% of all central government posts and white males hold 99% of all management positions.

Aside from major disparities in economic power and decision-making, this has led to enormous wage disparities between black and white South Africans. In the private sector, (white) managers earn on average 48 times more than workers. Fifteen percent of (black) central government workers receive wages below poverty levels.

The lifting of apartheid laws will not in itself overcome the effects of the economic disempowerment of black people and women. Hence the need for affirmative action programmes.

The business perspective

For business, the greatest fear has been that an ANC-led government will sooner or later introduce legislation which will compel them to address affirmative action. Under these circumstances, many companies have taken pre-emptive action. A recent SEIFSA survey shows, for example, that 38% of engineering companies have affirmative action policies in place, while 61% see the need for such

policies.

For many companies, affirmative action is also a business imperative. One of the ironies of the South African situation is that, while unemployment continues to spiral, the economy is severely constrained by a shortage of technical and managerial skills. These skills shortages cannot be met from the white population alone, nor can skilled foreign labour – which has been used in the past – fill the gap. Many companies also believe that a more representative and integrated workforce will enable them to understand and be more acceptable to their increasingly black consumer market.

Affirmative action in practice

Promotion of black people (and less so women) within companies in South Africa is now fairly common. The focus has, however, been on the advancement and absorption of a few individuals into an existing hierarchy.

Company “black advancement programmes”

identify, recruit and train black people for junior management positions, usually “soft” jobs such as human resources and public relations.

At worst, this amounts to straight tokenism, with ill-qualified black incumbents holding the trappings of

office without any meaningful authority because management does not trust them to do the job anyway. Downgrading occurs, not only at the level of responsibility, but also in terms of benefits and perks (Innes, 1993).

At best, incumbents who may well be qualified to do the job find themselves operating in a hostile work and social environment. They are alienated both from their management “peers” and the majority black workforce, whom they are more often than not employed to “control”.

Management’s failure to give serious

attention to affirmative action is reflected by the fact that responsibility for designing and implementing affirmative action programmes is usually relegated to human resources or personnel departments and not seen as part of a company’s strategic business plan. Even where top management are involved, line and production management, who are often most hostile to such programmes, are not brought on board.

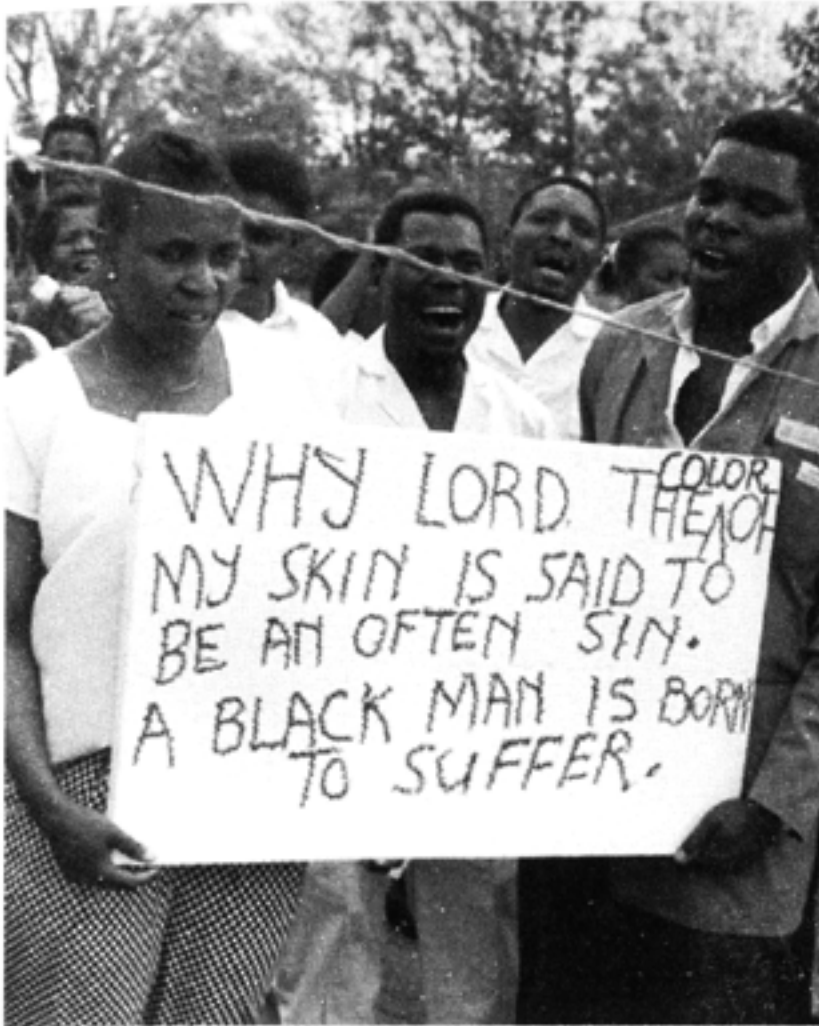
Business’ commitment to improving education and skills – an essential component of any serious affirmative action programme – is largely confined to sponsoring educational institutions through social responsibility programmes. Through these programmes, substantial resources are devoted to the development of black “informal sector” entrepreneurs. The focus on the informal sector has drawn sharp criticism from black business people. As company director Don Mkhwanazi points out, it seems to suggest that blacks should forever confine themselves to being

shopkeepers, taxi and bottle store owners. A number of major public companies have also taken steps to improve their public image through black representation on their boards of directors.

A survey conducted by the

Innes Labour Brief indicates that a number of companies have taken black advancement a few steps further. A major pharmaceutical company, for example, undertook a comprehensive programme of reorganisation to facilitate the creation of 12 new “junior management” posts. Twelve shopfloor workers – one white woman and eleven black men – were taken through an intensive process of both formal and on-the-job training and now occupy positions as supervisors within the company (Yudelowitz, 1993). Programmes to promote black people as supervisors and





foremen are also in place in other companies. While the great majority of artisans are white, there is a slow trickling of Africans into these positions.

The survey also shows that a number of companies have introduced assessment and adult education schemes to enable workers to progress. Grinaker Construction, for example, put 300 workers through such a scheme last year. Most of the companies surveyed also provide bursary schemes to encourage workers and their dependants to gain higher qualifications (Alperson, 1993).

The impact

Even on their own terms, black advancement schemes have had very limited impact. Statistics show that, in the last five years, there has been no overall increase in the number of managerial posts occupied by black people. Where promotions have occurred, men rather than women have been the beneficiaries.

After a programme lasting almost a decade, only four percent of Anglo-Alpha's management is black. Top management at Eskom – which has had an affirmative action policy since 1986 – includes just two black male managers (in marketing and communications) and a black female human

resources manager. Economic recession has also taken its toll on these programmes. Grinaker has retrenched a number of affirmative action employees (Alperson, 1993).

The impact of advancement programmes on the lives of the majority of shopfloor workers has been even more limited. Their position remains structurally the same as under apartheid. Existing power relations remain intact. COSATU general secretary Sam Shilowa puts it succinctly: "The economy continues to be owned and controlled by a small minority, while the majority remain trapped in squalor and poverty. A few blacks and women are co-opted into what was previously a white boys' club. The rules of the game, however, remain fundamentally the same. This is not empowerment, but black economic disempowerment."

The nett effect of these programmes has been to create divisions and conflict on the shopfloor. Unionists and other members of the democratic movement see the advancement schemes as "tokenism" and "window dressing" and view black managers as aspirant capitalists, individualists, "fat cats" and collaborators. This is particularly so when ex-shopstewards or activists are targeted for these promotions. Black supervisors and managers, in turn, are often faced with unenviable choices, especially when industrial action is on the agenda.

A trade union perspective

The starting point for the labour movement is that the economic power structure of South African society requires fundamental changes. Management's fears notwithstanding, social and workplace programmes negotiated directly with workers, rather than legislative measures, are seen as key mechanisms for achieving affirmative action. These would, however, be integrated with national measures, such as reforming the education and training system, as well as with broader economic empowerment.

A human resources policy

For COSATU, affirmative action is part of a wider process involving the provision of basic as well as technical skills to all workers.

COSATU's proposals on affirmative action are integrated into a broader human resources policy. The key elements of this policy are:

- An integrated, certificated education and training system linked to economic planning and restructuring;
- Paid education and training leave;
- Retraining for retrenched or unemployed workers;
- Training linked to grading and pay;
- Career pathing through training;
- Recognition of acquired skills;
- A strong emphasis on adult basic education (ABE);
- Addressing the needs of women workers through training, child-care and other facilities and "equal wages for skills of equal value".

Workplace democratisation

The long-term goal for COSATU is to equip workers with the skills needed to play a significant role in running both the country and the economy. The federation's human resources policy, if implemented, would go a long way in this direction. Workplace democracy is, however, the other side of this equation. Rejecting workers' participation schemes as a "bid to raise levels of productivity and profitability", COSATU general secretary Sam Shilowa calls for a "radical rethink on the process of industrial democratisation, to ensure meaningful economic empowerment of the majority of workers". For him, this involves management surrendering traditional areas of management prerogative such as decisions on investment, technology and distribution of profits.

SACTWU's Ebrahim Patel takes this further. Real affirmative action will involve collective bargaining being extended beyond wage rates and conditions of service to include such issues. While the strengthening of tripartite institutions such as the National Economic Forum (NEF) and the establishment of centralised bargaining structures are key to such a process, he also notes that "at plant level, trade unions need to have access to real power in shaping production and participating in decision-making". Meaningful worker

involvement in decision-making will also require transparency of action and disclosure of information by management.

The role of the state

COSATU feels the state should play an important role in implementing affirmative action. The state should:

- Set an example for the private sector through public sector employment practices;
- Make commissioning of goods and services by the state from private sector companies, as well as state funding or subsidies, conditional on the supplier showing satisfactory progress in implementing affirmative action;
- Ensure that the country's labour market statistical base is expanded in order to be able to monitor progress nationally; and
- Set in place an efficient monitoring body.

A vision without a programme?

In a recent presentation to COSATU, NUMSA's Adrienne Bird noted that "the central problem with the present (affirmative action) policy is that (it) does not give clear guidelines within which the goal can be achieved".

Chris Bonner and Jan Mahlangu of CWIU agree. Writing in *The Shopsteward*, they note that "we... believe that all our demands and struggles... are by their very nature, designed to bring about affirmative action. However, this argument is no longer good enough in the present context. We need to put forward specific, concrete proposals on affirmative action that we can sit down and negotiate with management".

The COSATU human resources policy is comprehensive and far-reaching. However, it has not yet been implemented in any systematic way. Only a few affiliates have taken it up in their sectors.

One of the policy's strong points is that it has the potential for far-reaching restructuring of whole sectors of the economy. Implementation will, in the first instance, require strong centralised bargaining structures. This is still an elusive goal in many sectors



Waiting for change: will affirmative action reach the floor?

where COSATU affiliates organise.

Even where centralised bargaining exists, problems arise. NUMSA led the way in formulating and implementing human resources policies. Centralised bargaining exists in the three major sectors where the union organises.

Last year "state of the art" agreements were entered into in the engineering, auto and tyre industries. "In-principle" agreement was achieved on the union's proposals for a completely restructured approach to grading, training and wages.

However, the practicalities of implementation have proved to be another story. The union is currently in dispute with auto employers around training modules, payment for education and wage differentials.

NUMSA has also found that principles adopted at national level are often not implemented at plant level. Organisational weaknesses compound this problem. Organisers and shopstewards do not always have the information and skills to take on management at plant level and find themselves overcome by detailed company proposals to which they cannot respond.

In an attempt to address these problems, the CWIU has drawn up a step-by-step action plan for negotiating affirmative action at the workplace. This includes guidelines on policy negotiations, research, formulating and negotiating demands and monitoring mechanisms. It is still too early to assess whether this has had any impact.

Workplace democracy

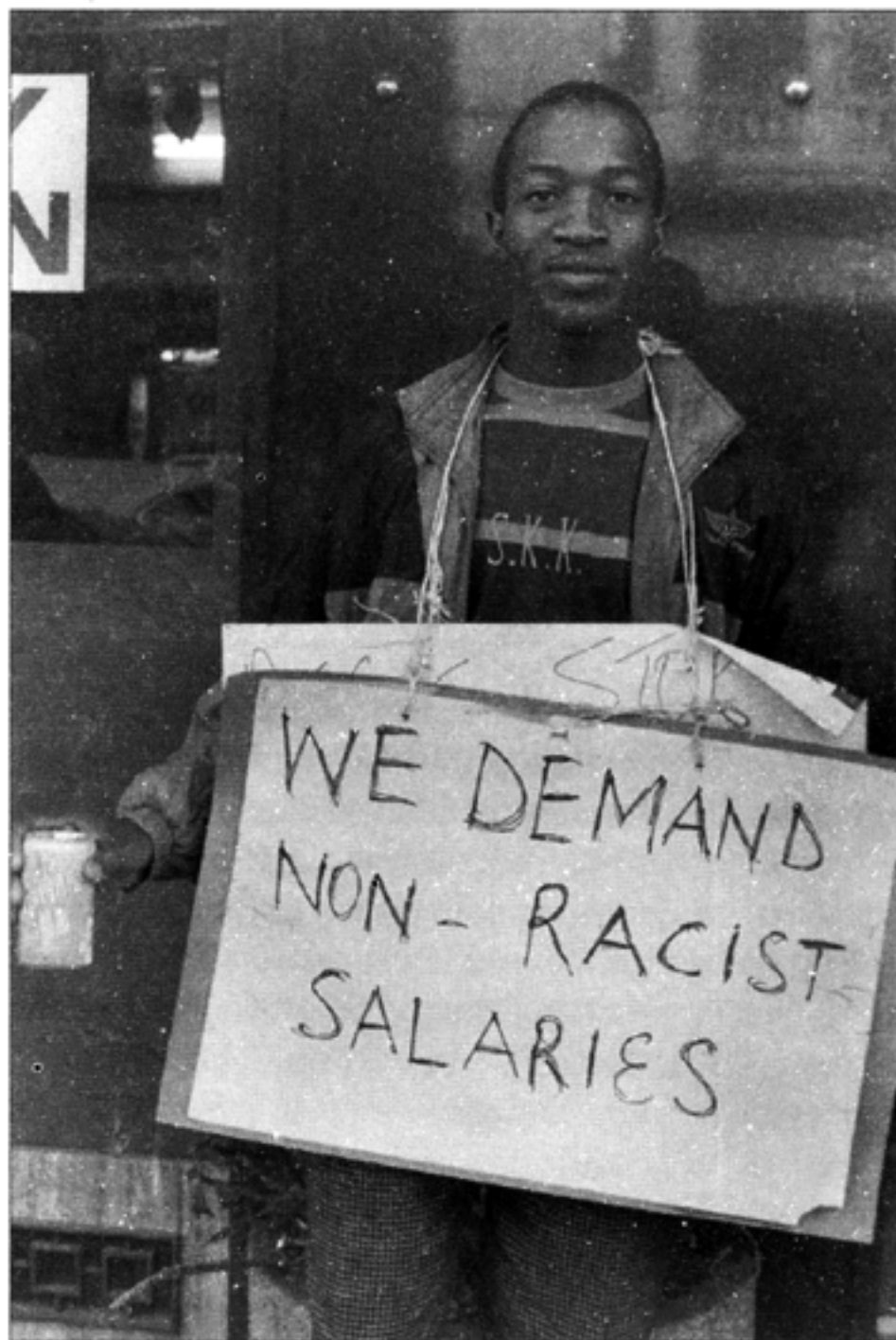
In recent years, management has introduced a wide range of "participation" schemes at workplace level. Unions' response to these initiatives has been extremely ambiguous and characterised either by an "ignore it and it will go away" attitude or outright rejection without posing concrete alternatives.

COSATU's proposals on workplace democratisation would, if implemented, have a major impact on power relations at the workplace. However, they need to be translated into practice.

A major question which needs to be answered is precisely how workplaces and institutions should be managed. Through

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CWIU strategy for affirmative action



PROCESS

Step One: Negotiate the policy

Negotiate a statement of principle on non-discrimination and affirmative action with management.

This must have the status to bind the company, management, white workers and anyone else who might be resistant to affirmative action. It may be necessary to hold workshops with various groupings in the company to bring them on board.

Demands:

- Policy statement
- Commitment by the highest level of company to the statement and to implementation of a programme
- Time off for discussion with workers
- Management to commit itself to bringing all management on board.

Step Two: Research on the workers

Do a detailed study of the status of women and blacks in the company. This would include looking at what jobs they do and what grades they are in, as well as what wages they earn.

This could be done by a contracted researcher, together with a joint committee set up for this purpose.

Demands:

- Full disclosure of information
- A Joint Affirmative Action Committee, comprised of equal representatives from the union and from management
- Union training for shopsteward representatives on the committee
- Time off to do research
- Employment of a researcher, paid for by management.

Step Three: Research on policies and practices

Do further research which scrutinises all policies and practices in the company for

discrimination and barriers to equality. Such research would look for hidden, as well as obvious, barriers.

It will be very important to identify those policies and practices which discriminate against blacks and women, and deny them equality of opportunity. An example would be unnecessary educational requirements for a job or lack of paid maternity leave. Some of the areas to be looked into could include:

- recruitment procedures
- selection standards and procedures for promotion, training and employment
- working conditions eg. health, safety, hours
- training and education
- career paths
- discipline procedures and practices
- retrenchment
- retirement
- wages
- benefits
- facilities
- special protections/code of conduct eg. sexual harassment.

Demands:

as at Step Two.

Step Four: Plan

Publish the findings of your research in the company and amongst union membership. Then develop your strategic plan. It should include the following elements:

- removing all barriers to equality – all discriminatory practices, policies or procedures uncovered in the research
- formulating positive measures
- setting time frames and targets
- monitoring and evaluation.

Step Five: Negotiate the plan

Negotiate the overall plan with management.

Demands:

- Management to agree to the overall plan
- Management to agree to provide all facilities, finances, training necessary to implement the plan.

Step Six: Negotiate details of the plan

Start to negotiate details of the plan.

How this is done will depend on circumstances. If there are many issues that need to be negotiated, then you will need to set priorities, timing and so on. This will obviously be an ongoing process.


Priority One: negotiate the removal of barriers. You might decide to start for example, with removing barriers to employment and promotion. This will involve such things as advertising of posts, selection criteria (like educational qualifications), and tests used for placing workers in training programmes.

Priority Two: negotiate on positive measures to be implemented. These could include Adult Basic Education programmes, bridging courses, counselling about careers, and encouraging or building confidence in people to do other work. For genuine affirmative action, positive measures will also have to include community and wider social upliftment.

Step Seven: Implement

- Work out your goals, time frames and targets. You will need short, medium and long-term goals. Just for example, say our goal is to have artisans reflect the population of the community by 1998. We'd say the intake of apprentices over the next 5 years must be 100 percent black and 50 percent women. In the short term, the company must advertise this widely in the community.
- Negotiate and agree on these with management.
- Remember that each part of the programme will require time frames and targets.

Step Eight: Monitor

Monitor progress systematically and keep a proper record. This could be the job of a joint monitoring committee. 

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flattening of the hierarchies traditionally found in all sectors of the economy. Does this mean that workers will be in a position to manage themselves? Will we see a situation where fewer and fewer supervisors are necessary?

The demand is also for effective participation at the highest levels of decision-making. If this is to be more than a token presence, workers will need extensive skilling of a kind that will not be achieved overnight.

Aspirations and expectations

Denied the opportunity to play any meaningful role in the political and economic life of this country, the majority of workers expect real (and rapid) changes in the "new" South Africa. It should not be assumed that the spirit of "egalitarianism" in the COSATU proposals will necessarily find favour with all workers.

NUMSA has discovered that black artisans are ambiguous about the union's proposed career path structure. It will mean that artisan-level workers will not enjoy the same privileges relative to lower categories of workers as were enjoyed by white artisans in the past. NUM has confidently stated that black mine supervisors will reject the privileges accorded to their white counterparts in the past. It remains to be seen whether this will indeed be the case.

If the restructuring proposed by the unions succeeds, and results in fewer supervisors, how will this answer the aspirations of black workers who have the skills and capacity to perform supervision work, but have been denied the opportunity to do so?

There is a real danger that the training/grading/wages package proposed by the unions could result in immense frustration among workers if unaccompanied by major reorganisation of production. Management is unlikely to accede to demands to pay workers higher wages for newly acquired or recognised skills unless they are actually performing higher-valued jobs. Unless labour devotes substantial attention to restructuring and succeeds in achieving its goals, most workers

will remain in much the same position they are in at present.

Redefining the bargaining unit

Flawed though they might be, initiatives already taken by management have resulted in a layer of black supervisory and management staff. Their numbers will increase as time goes on. Unions need to think carefully about how they will relate to this layer, as well as to the increasing numbers of black artisans.

Traditionally, COSATU unions have been based on blue-collar, semi- and unskilled membership. The unions have secured the right to bargain on behalf of this membership, but the bargaining unit normally excludes skilled and white-collar workers. Unless these workers are drawn in, they could sabotage the unions' restructuring initiatives particularly if, as has been the trend, they join hands with conservative, previously white staff associations and unions.

One option is to actively recruit these workers and redefine the bargaining unit to include them. This poses its own dangers. Like overseas, particularly in the United Kingdom, unions could become dominated by the interests of professional and skilled workers.

Women lose out

While comprehensive guidelines exist for improving the position of women workers, very little progress has been made in this regard. There is a danger that the proposals themselves could marginalise women workers even further. Bird says that the typical management response to the demands is to ensure that they employ as few women as possible. Concerted campaigning will be necessary to ensure that this trend is reversed.

A confused state

COSATU wants the state to set an example for the private sector through public sector employment practices. Although it is early days, indications are that the federation may well be disappointed.

The ANC-led government is not only hamstrung by constitutional guarantees to current civil service incumbents; in the past



White face of management: will affirmative action change the colour?

few months it has shown an inability to come to grips with the issue of affirmative action in the public sector. The recent debacle around the appointment of "special" ministerial staff, which ANC secretary general Cyril Ramaphosa defended in the name of affirmative action, is a case in point.

A significant number of the recently announced 11 000 civil service posts have been designated "role-playing" positions. No one is sure what this means, but the intention seems to be to prepare black incumbents for eventual high office in the public service. Experience in other African countries, Zimbabwe in particular, has shown that unless careful training and mentoring schemes accompany such a process, it is doomed to failure. Another problem is that no clear guidelines exist for recruiting and selecting civil servants to ensure that affirmative action is achieved. Two million people have applied for the 11 000 jobs and no system is in place to process these applications with affirmative action in mind.

The public sector unions have not developed comprehensive strategies on these issues and will need to make major interventions to take charge of the process.

Moving forward

Labour has tended to dismiss management initiatives on affirmative action as tokenism

and window dressing.

A number of company schemes certainly fit this description, but there have been some serious attempts to address the issue. Where there is the will, the way has often been hampered by the scarcity of skilled candidates to take up positions.

The unions' have drawn up far-reaching policy proposals, which have not been seriously addressed by management. What has been missing is a strategy for engaging management

on affirmative action.

The CWIU model goes a long way towards providing this strategy (see page 66 & 67). Through engagement at the workplace, unions could move towards joint control of the affirmative action process and ensure that their members' interests are advanced.

For management, this could provide a way of taking the conflict out of affirmative action. For both parties it would open up opportunities to take the heat out of racial relations at the workplace and to explore different ways of resolving a broad range of issues. ☆

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Job evaluation: *progress and questions*



In SA the first stepstowards broad-banding job grades are being taken. FAITH MACDONALD* raises some dilemmas.

Over the past few years, the union movement has placed considerable emphasis on tackling the question of grading jobs in a more equitable fashion. Three years ago, NUMSA initiated the move towards "broad-banding", first in the auto assembly and then in the metal industry. It proposed that the number of scheduled jobs below artisan level be reduced to a maximum of five, as opposed to 13, for example, in the metal industry. These grades were to be determined by skill and competency. This provided for not only career paths, but the portability of skills between

industries.

The five-grade system has already been implemented in the auto industry, but, this year, demands have surfaced to review and redefine certain occupations. There is now a need "to agree on an acceptable mechanism to resolve disputes during the transition to a skill- and competency-based system of evaluation."

In the metal industry, there is an in-principle agreement to reach this goal by 1 July 1996. A technical working committee of employer and trade union representatives has outlined a proposal for basic skill definitions for the five industry grades from general labourer to artisan. Behind these moves lies a shift from the traditional premise of grading based on tasks performed, to the skills and competencies required to perform the job in question.

Extensive research, locally and internationally, has led to considerable progress by the various working groups party to the National Training Board. This is looking into a policy based on ten years formal schooling, progressing to various forms of vocational and tertiary education and training. This would provide for modular credits which would lead to formal qualifications at a number of levels. Combined with an intensive approach to adult basic education, this policy will, in theory, provide the skills required for industry and career progression. In addition, Sectoral Education and Training Organisations (SETOs) will provide for specific industry requirements.

Before examining the implications of these changes, it is pertinent to note that the original schedules in the metal industry date back to the 1940s, when many scheduled jobs were defined arbitrarily. This acted as a form of job reservation for white workers. Many grades

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relied on a single-sentence description which bore little, if any, relation to the skills involved in performing the function.

Despite industrywide agreements, many companies which are party to centralised bargaining introduce "secondary" systems geared to perceived individual needs. Historically, two of the most popular systems used have been the Paterson and Peromnes methods. These use decision-making and a numerical calculation based on eight job-related factors. However, these were both devised decades ago for the Fordist/Taylorist production methods. In modern society, it is unrealistic to have eight – and up to 11 in the mining industry – levels of low and semi-skilled work.

Grading and workplace reorganisation

Given increasing emphasis on teamwork and multi-skilling, the establishment of more equitable systems is a top priority. What is needed is a method which takes into account skills and competence and at the same time provides for monetary compensation which eliminates glaring historical discrepancies.

There can be no doubt that grading is critical to workplace re-organisation and participation. South African business organisations have been characterised by a military-style hierarchical structure. If a 'meaner, leaner and flatter' – and fairer – structure is to be achieved, then the methods for evaluating the skills and worth of the workforce must be restructured. Take an example where all members of a work team have similar skills, are capable of rotation and are responsible for production targets and quality control. In such a case, there is no justifiable reason to grade them at different levels.

Broad-banding is a far more acceptable option, but its introduction in the South African context will give rise to many challenges and obstacles. Many questions arise.

Skills and value

Is it realistic to grade jobs simply on a skill or competency basis which does not take

sufficient cognisance of other worth factors? While the NUMSA slogan, "Sweeper to Engineer", is laudable, the plain facts are that not all sweepers want to or have the ability to become engineers. Furthermore, many jobs which require little skill are crucial to any organisation, and indeed society. Without the contribution of these lower-skilled functions, other more highly skilled occupations cannot be performed satisfactorily. Examples which immediately spring to mind are the well-worn ones of garbage collectors and cleaners.

Is it equitable to penalise such workers in terms of status or monetary compensation when they are performing valuable contributions? The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has demanded that grades be reduced from eight to four. In motivating this, the union said, "jobs should be distributed between the grades in a 'fair manner' which recognises the real contribution that workers make as well as the environment (surface/underground) in which jobs are carried out".

However, it is doubtful that employers and unions perceive 'real contribution', 'value', 'worth', 'stress' and 'danger' in the same light. Consensus will need meaningful negotiation with unions, as well as direct worker participation in decision-making on this. In Western society, there is a dubious general perception that managerial and white collar work carries more worth and monetary value than shopfloor work. In Japan and Germany, the philosophy is that, without the product, there is no company. Considerably more prestige and worth is given to the production environment. This is a lesson from major economies.

It could be postulated that not only worth, but 'skills' and 'competency' can be viewed as 'value-laden' (to say nothing of talent). There is therefore a risk that determining such variables at plant level will be highly subjective. This is more so if the union in the workplace is weak and not part of determining the distribution of skills in actual job content.

The recently published discussion document on a National Training Strategy which outlines proposals for a National

Qualification Framework acknowledges that competencies, are more or less impossible to measure or define. The document substitutes this term with the more appropriate word, 'outcome'. Thus, as noted previously, negotiation and worker participation is crucial in order to ensure fairness in respect of differing 'outcome' needs and levels within specific workplace situations.

Further dilemmas

An additional dilemma is that any qualification is only as good as the opportunities it provides. It could be argued that – at least in the short and medium term – a danger exists in training people for ultimately non-existent job openings in the formal or informal sector. This could be particularly pertinent to those employed and trained on a short-term basis through Public Works Programmes.

There is a need to identify not just current but future skill requirements. These skills will be needed for South Africa's industrial and service base to become adequately competitive



Will broadbanding grades fill the pay packet?

in a rapidly changing global economy. Computerised technology and data are becoming increasingly sophisticated and place very different demands on person-power and adaptability – at all levels of an enterprise or corporation.

SETOs will have to assess longer-term skill requirements necessitated by new technology options in their own sectors. There is no value in devising training programmes to equip workers, especially the unemployed, with skills which could be obsolete in five years time.

Each job or function within a specified industry or organisation has to be carefully analysed to ascertain the precise nature and worth of the work performed and range of ability required. In addition, the degree of skill within each band must be determined in order to eliminate overlap. This is a very tricky area. Skill bands will vary between organisations within the same industry, and even more so between differing industries. Indeed, NUMSA demands in the auto industry illustrate this.

The portability of skills is also limited. For example, there are 15 categories of mechanics. An auto mechanic familiar with the assembly and production of one manufacturer cannot simply transfer those skills to a plant producing a totally different model. This has distinct implications for the feasibility of 'portable' and transferable skills. Hopefully, the SETO's will help overcome this problem, but this cannot be done overnight.

Another major hurdle is "the recognition of prior learning". This relates to the knowledge and skills acquired on-the-job and through work experience as opposed to any formal training or qualification. Numerous skills on the shopfloor have not been recognised or utilised due to apartheid. Over the past few years, this has been of mounting concern to the unions. Many workers perform the work of qualified artisans but, for reasons beyond their control, have been unable to obtain the necessary qualification. They have therefore not received the appropriate status or monetary reward from the employer. Given that many such people are at best semi-literate, the criteria on which they are tested for competence will require innovation.



Move to teamwork requires new approach to grading

Grading professional and managerial jobs

If the skills and knowledge needed for any job are measured through, for example, an adequately devised scale ranging from simple to very complex (ie simple, medium, complex, very complex), this principle can be applied to all components of any job, be it manual, technical, cognitive or managerial. This mechanism can be used to define the number of bands applicable to an entire organisation.

Most of the debate on job evaluation and training is geared towards the vocational and technical aspects of work, with the intention of upgrading the skill of the production workforce. However, the broad-banding method could apply equally to managerial and professional personnel, as in Japan.

Given that any form of evaluation is linked to pay, a reward structure based on broad-banding principles could include provision for the negotiation of not only minima and maxima wages, but also the acquisition of skills, long service, productivity, value, merit and any other criteria the parties to any agreement might deem feasible. Because the differential between the minima and maxima per band is considerably greater than that of current grading systems, there is greater scope for negotiating the amount paid to employees in respect of these factors.

Notwithstanding the above questions, NUMSA's proposals for in-depth audits of all jobs undertaken within strict parameters based on actual job content and the degree and variety of skill and value involved, together with adequate opportunities for workers to acquire additional skills (both through external and internal training) and/or responsibility to move to a higher level are a

radical improvement on the past.

Conclusion

The upgrading of the current workforce to meet immediate needs and the longer-term measures to produce a generation geared towards the development of a more highly skilled and adaptable workforce are of crucial economic importance.

However, in attempting to achieve this, care must be taken not to "lose the forest for the trees". A productive workplace is crucial to economic recovery, a meaningful reduction in unemployment and a competitive edge in world markets. Union involvement and worker empowerment and participation is of the utmost importance in achieving such a recovery.

However, most of our trading partners have long since recognised that full employment belongs in the past and that large numbers of the economically active population will be unable to find formal employment in their lifetimes. This being the case, care should be taken not to introduce over-zealous but potentially restrictive education and vocational training (as well as grading) systems which do not permit sufficient flexibility for the needs of human beings and their potential contribution to alternative aspects of society. Not everyone has aspirations to be president, be it of a corporation or a country. *Fe*