Health and Welfare Sector
Education and Training Authority
HWSETA

RESEARCH REPORT

Exploring the role of cognitive and non-cognitive skills for first-time entrants into the workplace: An employer's perspective

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are that of the Author and not that of the HWSETA.

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Executive Summary

The role of employee's cognitive and non-cognitive skills are essential to employers when facilitating learner transition from training into the workplace (graduate's recruitment for employment). The study focused on determining the role of employee's cognitive and non-cognitive skills when employers' identify and recruit new entrants for their organizations. The main purpose of training students (theoretical and practical), is for them to graduate with the required basic minimum competencies and skills that are essential to enter the workplace and be productive. In the competitive labour environment where there is perpetual unemployment of even graduates', there is a need for a reflection on how both technical skills (cognitive) and personality traits (non-cognitive) affect this transition from a training institution to the workplace.

The study used a qualitative method and applied stratified sampling techniques. The participants for the study were randomly selected. An in-depth discussion guide was used to guise in-depth interviews. Regardless of the levels of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, the study identified employers' bias during the graduates' recruitment process, especially the biases on race, on age and maturity. This means that regardless of the possession or lack of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, there are certain races of certain age and level of maturity that enjoys priority and privilege of consideration for employment. In addition to these bias tendencies, is the additional bias based on graduates' gender and location. Employers have their own rationale and motivation for this bias practice; they are based on their observations and operational needs. For example, employers find older graduates or employees are more motivated, focused, and committed mainly because they have responsibilities. Their behavior and organizational commitment reflect that they value their work.

As much as both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills are equally important in the workplace, the labour market is favourable to graduates with a background in commerce (accounting), life and natural sciences and mathematics. They are more preferred because they are likely to adapt quickly to most operational and production spaces; this is based on what the skills the economy needs. The study recommends partnership, especially in co-funding graduates, experiential training and orientation of graduates to smoothen their transition. The identified biases on race, age, gender, and maturity is unfortunate constrain the potential for organizational sustainability and resilience. Improving the diversity of skills and graduates is essential in the development and innovation of the workplace. Lastly, new employee orientation and socialization should not be treated as an event, rather as central

to organizational renewal, learning, innovation and transformation approach. All stakeholders must invest time and money in this process of learner-graduates transition into the workplace.

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I. List of Acronyms

DOH   Department of Health
DSD   Department of Social Development
HWSETA   Health and Welfare Sector and Education and Training Authority
TVET   Technical Vocational Education and Training
WIL   Work Integrated Learning

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on how the cognitive and non-cognitive skills contribute to recruitment and adaptation of first-time entrants into the workplace. The study seeks to find out if these skills influence the employer's choice. For many individuals, whether they are entering the workplace for the first time after graduating or as part of their training, there is excitement and anticipation for the world of work. This brings about a new change in an individual's life. Although it is an exciting time, it can also bring about anxiety. While others may flourish, for others it could present a stressful period in their lives. This is where both cognitive and non-cognitive skills are essential.

The theoretical learning that has taken place in the past either at a tertiary institution or as part of a qualification plays a role in the transition to the workplace. However, research indicates that some employers have stated that theoretical learning does not thoroughly prepare learners for the work environment (Negarandeh, 2014). The result is that the responsibility now shifts to employers who must train and ensure there is an effective transition into the workplace.

Potential employees enter the workplace for the first time in many ways, sometimes as learners through a work-based training programme to obtain practical work experience after graduating or as part of their qualification requirements. Learners are put through a work-based training programme to primarily help them acquire basic required minimum competencies to enter and perform effectively in the workplace. However, within the workplace, there are many factors, which require a certain level of possession of both the cognitive skills and non-cognitive abilities. Cognitive skills are essential for the execution of the actual job activities and non-cognitive abilities help the new employee cope with the organizational as a demanding productive environment. Therefore, both the lack and possession of these is key in how the new employee adapts into the workplace. Cognitive skills are those referred to as intelligence, technical skills and the ability to solve problems, which can be measurable (Brunello and Schlotter, 2011). Non-cognitive skills refer to a demonstration (self-reporting) of character, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors that can influence an individual's motivation, perseverance, and self-control which are harder to measure (Morrison, Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Brunello and Schlotter, 2011).

During the exposure to practical work experience, the focus is placed on the application of theory into practice. The implication for this is that the development of cognitive skills (technical skills) enjoys priority over other aspects of learner development, such as non-cognitive skills. This is sometimes not a problem especially in highly regulated and specialized sectors like health and welfare services. The interesting key challenge is that of opening up the workplace to adequately cater for both operational needs (production) and as a training space. An assumption could be made that given the normal production imperatives in most workplaces, it is likely that time dedicated to developing non-cognitive skills may not be enough.

The assumption is that, if cognitive and non-cognitive skills play a role in adapting to the workplace, employers look for certain skills and personality traits when recruiting potential candidates, as these maybe central skills for employability into an organization. Simultaneously, employers are also responsible for training and ensuring new entrants to the workplace are thoroughly prepared so that they perform effectively. This makes the views, perceptions, and needs of the employers essential in the business of training.

In this study, a learner refers to an individual who enters the workplace for the first time and has or is currently undertaking an HWSETA work-based training programme. The work-based training programme refers to an HWSETA funded programme that provides a learner with the opportunity to gain practical work experience. Tertiary institution refers to any society or organization for the promotion of scientific, educational or another public object (HWSETA, 2017).

In an economic environment where the unemployment rate is high especially amongst graduates and the youth, it is essential to look into all relevant elements and factors that directly or indirectly contribute to employment, and mainly those that enhance work preparedness and therefore leading to employability. Therefore, an employer reflection on desired skills and attributes is critical (Brunello and Schlotter, 2011). As such, cognitive and non-cognitive skills play a role in the transition into the workplace. Furthermore, employers must be prepared to aid individuals through planning.

Given this above background, the purpose of the study is to assess the role that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills play in the transition to the workplace for first-time entrants. Furthermore, the study sought to determine how cognitive and non-cognitive skills influence recruitment and the type of training provided to learners by employers to facilitate learning in the workplace.

1.2 The rationale of the Study

In an employment environment where there is perpetual graduates' unemployment, there is a need for a reflection on how both technical skills (cognitive) and personality traits (non-cognitive) can be packaged for effective planning graduate recruitment and absorption (Mmatli, 2015). This is a holistic approach to tracking the development of a student from both the social and training contexts in joining the workplace. For improving the organizational setting, it is important to understand how employers plan and manage the transition from theory to practice for learners with different skill sets, orientations, and backgrounds.

1.3 Problem Statement, Aim, and Objectives

1.3.1 Problem statement

Given the current rate of unemployment in the country in which lacking essential skills is cited as a contributing factor, there is a great need for a continuous investigation into how best learners could be effectively prepared for the workplace and their professional development. Employers are a major part of building contemporary understanding on this, as such their reflection and input is critical. The reflection of the new entrants into the workplace is confirmed into how their personal traits and technical skills enable their adaptation. Again, it is important to determine how these may influence employers' preferences when recruiting.

1.3.2 Aim

The aim of this study was to determine the role (recruitment and adaptation) of cognitive skills and non-cognitive attributes for learners entering the workplace for the first time.

1.3.3 Objectives

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To assess whether cognitive or non-cognitive skills influence learners' abilities to adapt to the workplace;
- To determine whether employers design programmes to facilitate learner transition;
- To determine employers' skills preferences during recruitment.

1.4 Overview of the study

The study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, which includes the rationale, problem statement, aim, objectives and the overview of the report. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, which covers concepts and definitions, mainly of the cognitive skills and non-cognitive attributes. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology of the study. Chapter 4 provides the analysis of findings and discussion. Lastly, Chapter 5 presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a conceptualization and contextualization of the main concepts, which is the cognitive skills and non-cognitive behavioural traits. This contextualization extends into locating these concepts within an organizational space (the employer and work environment). Both the conception and contextualization of these concepts demonstrate a high degree of complementarity.

2.2 Concepts of Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills

It is relatively easy to define and describe cognitive skills in that they are considered to be occupational intelligence, technical skills and the ability to solve problems, which is mainly developed through training and it is measurable (Brunello and Schlotter, 2011). The argument is that cognitive ability is viewed as a psychological resource that is available to individuals in varying degrees, which involves the ability to learn, to acquire a vast amount of knowledge and make skilled decisions based on that knowledge. This means that cognitive ability or intelligence can also be described by the ability to be fully engaged and adapt to an environment (Sternberg, 2003).

As a concept, non-cognitive skills refers to a demonstration (self-reporting) of character, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors that can influence an individual's motivation, perseverance, and self-control which are harder to measure. Broadly these include consciousness, awareness, empathy, emotional stability, and maturity, which may be demonstrated by a willingness to cooperate (teamwork), independence and self-confidence (Morrison Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Brunello and Schlotter, 2011).

An argument may be made that these set of skills are complementary to each other, in that cognitive skills will get an individual recognized and a job, but non-cognitive skills/abilities will sustain him/her. The reason being that non-cognitive skills are associated with social skills, motivation, and leadership, which are all essential for organizational leadership and management activities. Cognitive skills are easier to measure the achievement of the required standard of performance and even quality of the product or services, while non-cognitive skills are not as easy to measure because the about self-demonstration which needs employer observation.

2.3 Contextualizing Cognitive and Non-cognitive skills

There is the argument that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills play a role in an individual's transition into the workplace. A focus on the cognitive and non-cognitive skills is critical for both training service providers (i.e. universities) and employers. Tertiary institutions do have an interest in graduate adaptation into the industry; hence during the training encounter, it is of great importance that general skills that focus on building character for the future are inculcated. This is essential in that they have a burden of transforming a raw human being into a productive, skilled potential employee. To achieve relative organizational continuity and stability, employers have a burden of contributing to the transition of the graduate from training into an organization (operational site). This calls for employers to be proactive in matters of talent identification, recruitment, and retention (Mmatli, 2015).

In addition to the discussion above, it must be noted that organizations exist within the socio-economic, political contexts, which influence how they conduct their business. Similarly, graduates have to immerse themselves in this context and thrive. As a result, the development and maintenance of emotional intelligence to adapt to life situations are imperatives for every graduate entering the workplace. The level of emotional awareness can facilitate or impede the smooth adaptation of the graduate. This is crucial because if the graduate enters the workplace with a false sense of entitlement and unrealistic expectations, adaptation can prove to be a challenge. It takes self-knowledge and operational awareness for a new graduate during the transition to realize what they need to know to fit well into the workplace (Mmatli, 2015).

The importance and interest in non-cognitive skills have increased over the years, as many people have assumed and believed that cognitive skills are what will guarantee an individuals' success in life (Morrison Gutman and Schoon, 2013). This indicates a shift in the perceptions around the close association between the conceptions of cognitive theory and emotional intelligence. To some degree, emotional intelligence is related to a discrete ability from the general intelligence in that it enables the prediction of negative career thoughts and this also could account for general cognitive ability. (Brunello and Schlotter, 2011). This argument advocates for a balanced and holistic appreciation of both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills. In this way, organizations will benefit from recruiting and retaining emotionally stable and conscious employees

Amongst the tools available to determine ability and employability of a potential employee, a psychometric assessment can be employed. These range from communication skills, motivation,

teamwork skills, leadership skills, academic achievement, socio-emotional regulation, time preference, mathematical competence, cultural awareness and expression, digital competence, etc, (Brunello and Schlotter, 2011). Traits that are considered relevant and necessary in a particular environment may be of less importance in another. Along with the employer's appreciation of the role of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. As part of managing a successful transition, employers need to invest in implementing programmes that will target the further development of these (Morrison, Gutman and Schoon, 2013).

In addition, the support provided to learners by employers creates a platform that would allow learners to apply both their cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Thus further ensuring a successful transition (Negarandeh, 2014). This can be achieved through training programmes that will integrate theory and practical learning. A training programme must outline the duties of the learner and obligations of the employer (Kruss et al., 2017). To ensure that the process is a success, a training programme would be created as such that an employer must provide guidance to a learner with regard to their tasks while affording them the opportunity to seek clarification and validation for the tasks they are required to complete. This would ultimately create a learner that is knowledgeable and competent to complete tasks without employer supervision and be able to assist other employees. More importantly, in addition to training programmes equipping learners, they should receive support for job-related and personal stressors (Walker, Earl, Costa and Cuddihy, 2013).

2.4 The Employer and Workplace

An employer is identified as an employer in an agreement who undertakes to ensure compliance with the employer's duties regarding the agreement (HWSETA, 2017). Through the support that is offered to the employers, the HWSETA has specific outcomes that are attached to each investment. As leaders of organizations, they have a burden to ensure that they secure success by enabling employees to integrate, develop and apply both technical and social skills in their operations. Affective commitment (emotional bonds), and normative commitment (feeling of indebtedness) should be inculcated in employees as they continue to serve in their organizations.

In many ways, employee's expectations have to be met, in order for organizations to benefit from the application of their skills and experience (Meyer and Allen, 1991). The crux of this argument is that if an organization makes an investment in creating positive socialization experiences through talent management, innovation, and transformation, they can expect to enjoy loyalty and long-term commitment from their employees. Central to the nature of investment is that an employee should be

given multiple opportunities for continuous development of both the technical skills (cognitive) and human relations skills (non-cognitive).

Although employers are often driven by production and profits, part of organizational growth, transformation, and innovation is to ensure that there exists a synergy or balance between profits and employee training. This could be used in securing organizational commitment, which is an integrated approach to appreciating attitudinal and behavioral attributes of the employees (Meyer and Allen's, 1991). There are three distinct dimensions of organizational commitment; and these are effective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to employees' commitment to emotional bonds, links to, and engagement in, their organizations. Continuance commitment refers to employees' perceptions of the benefits and advantages they could lose if they leave their organizations. Normative commitment refers to employees' sense of indebtedness to their organizations. Employees may feel obliged to stay in their organizations because of social norms (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This means that in the long term, employers enjoy a certain level of stability in their products by having invested in careful, targeted and intentional recruitment as well as organizational behavioral orientation.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology of the study, which includes the study setting and the target population, followed by the sampling method and size. Lastly, also discusses the data collection method, data analysis and presents the limitations of the study.

3.2 Qualitative methodology

A qualitative method is a research approach, which seeks to understand data through a deeply intense and holistic overview of the context under study, often involving interacting within the everyday lives of individuals, groups, communities, and organization (Gray, 2009). According to Campbell (2014: 1):

> A researcher that selects a qualitative research method collects open-ended, emerging data that is then used to develop themes. This method allows for a study of an exploratory nature. The exploration and discovery of data via a qualitative research method often indicate that there is not much written about the participants or the topic of study. Some of the characteristics of qualitative research include taking place in a natural setting, using multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, emerging data rather than prefigured data, and being fundamentally interpretive.

The study used individual in-depth interviews with employers for data collection. These were in the form of semi-structured interviews comprising of close-ended and open-ended questions. The information will be more in-depth from which the researcher will be able to identify emerging themes. In addition, employers are stakeholders within the sector, and as such, it was important to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews.

3.3. Study Setting and Target population

Based on the proposed data collection and sampling method, it was difficult to pre-determine the regions where the study would be conducted. Therefore, for the regions, the researcher was guided through the process of identifying eligible organizations who met the criteria to participate. The study was only conducted in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and Western Cape. The main reason for this choice of provinces is because these provinces had the largest number of employer organizations that offered training across various work-based programmes as per the recruitment criteria for the study.

The target population for the study was employers who hosted learners in more than one HWSETA work-based training programmes in the 2016/17 financial year. This refers to employers who hosted learners in both learnership and internship programmes simultaneously. This included employers who hosted learners simultaneously completing different learnerships or internships in different disciplines, but were all completing a work-based training programme. For instance, if an employer had different learners completing Nursing: Bridging and National Certificate: Pharmacist Assistant learnership at the same time, they were eligible for selection. Such an employer is able to give a richer comparative reflection and information.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The rationale was to focus on employers who recruit and train learners across various work-based programmes. By recruiting and training in different programmes, the requirements for selection may vary and so too will the training required. Employers should be able to compare across different work-based training programmes. Thus providing richer information and increasing the depth of understanding into the role of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in the workplace. Furthermore, based on the above criteria only employer representatives that were responsible for recruitment, planning, and training within the human resources were requested to participate.

3.4 Sampling Method and Size

The study used the stratified sampling technique. In stratified sampling, the population is partitioned into groups called strata, and sampling is performed separately within each stratum (Rossi, Wright, and Anderson, 2013). As already mentioned, the target population for the study was employers who hosted learners in more than one HWSETA work-based training programmes in the 2016/17 financial year. The two strata were the health and welfare sector. In addition, within each strata, the researcher randomly selected employers who had learners training in more than two work-based programmes.

The researcher reviewed all Memoranda of Understanding's (MOU) and employer databases to determine which employers participated in more than one work-based training programme or employers who had learners simultaneously completing different learnerships or internships in different disciplines. Only twenty-five (25) employers met these criteria and the proposed number of in-depth interviews was fifteen (15), nine for the health sector and six for the welfare sector.

Identification and Recruitment of participants

Within these identified organizations, the researcher identified representatives who were either at management or executive level to request permission to conduct the study and to assist in the identification of individuals responsible for recruitment, training, and planning for the organization to participate in the interview.   The identified employers were contacted by telephone to participate in an in-depth interview. A confirmation e-mail was sent once an appointment had been confirmed by an employer. The employers were spread across DSD allied occupations, which are associated with social sciences orientations, and others were allied to DOH occupations which are based on orientations medical, biological and clinical sciences.

Participants came from small, medium and large organizations including hospitals, pharmacies, NGOs and provincial government departments of Health and Social Development. Amongst the specialists that were interviewed were Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs), Project Managers, Assessors, Moderators, and Training Managers. Those representing the provincial departments of Health were Assistant Managers, Deputy Director of Human Resource Training and Development and a Manager in People Development.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Overall, the response from the employers was positive. However, out of the proposed 15 interviews (9 for health and 6 for welfare), six interviews for health and three for welfare sector where conducted, bringing the total number of interviews conducted to nine. As with stakeholders, the preference is to conduct in-depth interviews and interviews had to be recorded. As a result, permission had to be requested from and granted by the participant to record the interview. Fortunately, all participants granted the researcher permission to record the interviews.

All recorded in-depth interviews were allocated unique identifiers, then transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed to categorize information obtained into themes that emerged during the interviews. The notes also captured during the interviews were recorded and stored as they are confidential information.

3.6 Limitations of the study

The main challenge encountered was with regard to employer availability due to the timing of the data collection. Due to time constraints, data collection could not be extended to accommodate all employers who were willing to participate. To counter this challenge, time for those interviewed was extended to gather more information on the subject to ensure the representation of views. In the future, a study involving employers will be conducted in the alignment with the availability of the employers.

SECTION 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this section, the researcher provides an analysis of the findings. The analysis focused on a number of factors identified under the three objectives of this study, which include the type of work-based training programmes, the recruitment process, cognitive and non-cognitive skills, training programmes followed and; employability and performance. Since the interviews were semi-structured, these factors were used to the themes used in the analysis of the interviews.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.2.1 Description of Employer

The employer organizations that were interviewed included small, medium and large organizations, which included hospitals, pharmacies, NGOs and provincial government departments. The employers interviewed had hosted learners either in learnerships and internships or had learners simultaneously completing different learnerships or internships in different disciplines, but were all completing a work-based training programme as described below:

- Nursing: Bridging
- Advanced Diploma in Medical and Surgical
- Post-Basic Diploma: Midwifery
- National Certificate: Pharmacist Assistant
- Further Education and Training Certificate: Pharmacist Assistant
- Further Education and Training Certificate: Social Auxiliary Work
- Further Education and Training Certificate: Child and Youth Care Work, and;
- Occupational Certificate: Health Promotion Officer.

4.2.2 The Recruitment Process

The recruitment process was one of the key themes, which was meant to understand whether at this level employers are already considering a good balance of both cognitive skills and non-cognitive abilities. Therefore, does it mean that even at a planning level when decisions are made to recruitment, there is some guidance with regard to the recruitment process and criteria. The employers are currently following what would be considered a standard recruitment process. This includes advertising, conducting interviews and with some employers an assessment before a final decision is made.

Currently, employers would advertise for the work-based training programme either internally or externally or use both methods simultaneously. When advertising internally this would mean the work-based programme is only open to internal and current staff. However, some organizations belong to a bigger network of forums which allows them access to advertising 'internally' to current employees from other organizations. Very often this would be employees who were either volunteering or looking at upskilling themselves.

For external adverts, online job portals and; local and national newspapers were used to advertise based on employer preference. Local newspapers were intentionally used to attract potential candidates within a specific region due to the employer location. The importance of employer location has to be taken into consideration based on the issues surrounding the stipend amount provided to learners and the associated costs of traveling to and from work and in some cases costs of accommodation that would overburden learners who are forced to relocate and be closer to the employer location.

The advert would include a list of the minimum requirements to be met in order to qualify for the position. These requirements were mainly academic qualifications such as Matric, the subjects passed in Matric and a minimum grade received for the subject.

These requirements would be used to shortlist and interview the potential candidate, and after that, a selection is made. The majority of employers only conducted interviews. Some employers would require learners to complete an assessment that would test either cognitive or non-cognitive skills or both. However, for some employers, an assessment was compulsory as a requirement based on the type of work-based training programme. Other employers deemed an assessment to be necessary to aid them in making a selection. With the exception of employers who advertise and recruit internally, they can review an employee's performance assessment over time as very often the leadership would be used to upskill an employee and ultimately lead to a promotion.

4.2.3 Recruitment Bias

The issue of possible bias was probed as to if employers had any bias towards certain factors during their recruitment. For instance, the researchers wanted to know if employers had a preference for learners from specific tertiary institutions or learners of a specific gender as these may play a role in adapting to the workplace. Certain tertiary institutions may prepare learners better for the workplace and this could be at the cognitive or non-cognitive level. Employers were further asked whether during

a recruitment process they would have a preference towards race, age or any other factor that would create bias or persuade them to select a potential candidate over another.

With regard to gender, employers cited that more females than males apply for learnerships or internships. This came as no surprise as most employees in the health and welfare sector are females. There was a preference for females in certain work-based programmes due to the nature of the work. Employers perceived that females were better suited for the type of work environment. This preference may be triggered by socially ascribed gender roles, norms, and practices. Nurses, social workers, etc., were traditionally supposed to be women because these occupations are about caring for people and women are regarded as carers and nurturers in society.

With regard to age, all employers were restricted by HWSETA requirements, as funding is provided to the youth between ages 18-35. However, some employers admitted to having a bias towards certain age groups. Where one employer might prefer those who are older in their late 20's or early 30's for instance, another would have a preference for younger candidates. The argument is that someone older has more to lose and will be more motivated and thus committed to completing the learnership. On the other hand, younger employees tend to be less determined and motivated. Other employers argued the opposite and stated that because older employers have families and a lot more responsibilities, they face challenges during the programme. Family circumstances arise of which an employer must be accommodative when there is a failure to attend classes or arrive at work. The preference for different age groups was mainly a result of an employer's experiences and the learning curves over the years.

Most employers showed a preference for individuals who were already working as volunteers. Volunteers have the experience and better idea with regard to the type of environment and work they will be required to do. It is easier to assume that they are more likely to complete the leadership and will have a higher level of motivation than other learners. One employer even stated that they are less interested in the stipend and are more tolerant with the delays in payment of stipends (the delay caused by late payments from the HWSETA to the employer or service provider).

The preference of learners by race was more determined by learners' ability to speak the prominent local languages used in the area the employer is located and not necessarily the racial demographics of the region. The employer location created a bias towards race because learners were required to speak the local language and it could be argued that race is can be a proxy for the ability to speak in local languages. It is clear that as much as employers may want to ensure equitable racial demographic

representation, sometimes it is hardly possible to secure adequate applications from learners of different races with the appropriate language skills.

The preference for learner's location was more of a consideration on the part of the employer to minimize traveling costs or the need to have learners relocate in order to be closer to the workplace. Where possible or when deemed necessary, employers would add an additional amount to top up the HWSETA stipend.

4.2.4 Desired Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skills

The cognitive skills required were part of the academic requirements as per each work-based training programme. Where a matric was the highest qualification required, the emphasis was provided with regard to the subjects employers required. For instance, nurses must be able to calculate and measure and thus mathematics as a requirement was vital.

As mentioned, some employers did require potential candidates to complete an assessment to measure cognitive ability. Others relied on results and qualifications already obtained by the learner. Most employers said they apply an equal weighting to both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, this in line with the fact that the health and welfare sector is a services industry. Although some employers did not require learners to complete an assessment, the interviews would contain behavioral questions to try and assess a learner's behavior and thinking.

4.2.5 Training Programmes

Keeping records in any training process is essential, hence it was important to check if employers created and followed a specific training programme records keeping process. For learnership, all learners were provided with a logbook that required learners to complete prescribed tasks over a certain number of hours. The logbooks require sign-off and must be submitted as proof of completion. The employer's only involvement and responsibility are to ensure that the learners are exposed to different tasks and signing-off on completed tasks in the logbook.

With regard to internships for learners from Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, some colleges were more involved than others. Some colleges even created a schedule based on curricula that were covered as part of the course and requested employers to expose learners. For

learners on internships from universities, most employers admitted that they did not have a training programme. They would expose learners to what was covered as part of the curricular as well.

4.2.6 Employability

Overall, it was critical to know from the employers' perspective attributes that make learners employable upon completion of the work-based training programmes. There were a number of factors that were cited, such as these below:

- Some employers were using the HWSETA funding to upskill their current employees and thus upon completion they would retain their jobs. As a result, this would result in a 100% absorption rate.
- In some cases, the number of work-based training positions advertised were directly related to a number of vacancies created by the employer and therefore would be available to learners. It is important to note that not all learners would accept the offer of employment by an employer for their own personal reasons.
- Some employers went the extra mile and required learners to take on additional training and monitored performance to determine the suitability and fit for the environment. The additional training would equip learners with the necessary skills for employment opportunities within the organization, and;
- Those who were unable to absorb learners said they would give preference to previous learners when positions were available. Other employers used their networks to find placements for learners.

This clearly indicates that whenever employers are given space and freedom to choose potential learners that they need, the process is often successful in that they know exactly what their workplace needs. In addition, they take ownership of upskilling learners to ensure that they become a perfect fit for their workplace.

4.3 DISCUSSION

For the recruitment process, the expectation was that all learners would be completing some form of assessment. However, this only applied to employers who were required to conduct an assessment as per qualification requirements. Other employers created their own internal assessment to test the non-

cognitive skills. Those who were not conducting an assessment relied on responses to the behavioral questions in the interview to also test non-cognitive skills.

There was some thought given with regard to where and how advertising for positions would be conducted. This was done with the intent to intentionally attract candidates living in a particular area. This was also to help minimize costs such as traveling and accommodation for learners.

Most employers did follow a training programme and where one was not available, they exposed learners to tasks that were covered as part of their curricula. The majority of employers stated that they applied an equal weighting to both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. However, the assessment of these skills was not exhaustive and always tested.

What was surprising is that employers had a bias with regard to age, gender, learner's location and work experience, which are not related to either cognitive or non-cognitive skills. It could be said that these preferences were more of a result of past experiences for each employer. Some preferences were a result of the nature of work or employer location, which were generally out of the employer's control. These preferences were based on what works best for both the employer, work environment and the learner. Preferences as harsh as they may seem are not intended to exclude individuals but rather they demonstrate that what works best for one employer may not work at all for the next employer based on the individual context.

It is clear that neither cognitive nor non-cognitive skills were a determinant of employability after completion of a work-based training programme, but other factors do come into play. For example, for employers to absorb graduates, vacancies in the organization must exist. However, others would train and recruit the number of learners based on the number of vacancies created and available within the organization.

SECTION 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations. Overall, what came through in the study is that there is an equal value of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills during the recruitment processes. Again, one conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that employers have less confidence or trust in the training systems, hence they look below the need for basic technical skills and look more into the character (personal traits) of the potential employees. It through such approach that the employer orientation programmes are built on; to ensure adequate socializing new employees. As human capital is essential in the life of an organization, employers' do invest in facilitating learner's transition from training to practice to ensure their organizational sustainability.

5.2 SUMMARY

As the purpose of the research study was to assess the role of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills in the transition into the workplace from an employer's perspective. This would assess the involvement of employers in aiding learners through the transition into the workplace. The duty of employers involves the selection of learners and the provision of training programmes to facilitate the process of transition.

Overall, employers did admit that cognitive and non-cognitive skills were important factors to determine a successful transition into the workplace. Employers also indicate that they sometimes do not always assess their recruits, but training programmes were necessary to expose learners to different aspects of the work environment to better equip them. One question that emerges from this assessment exercise is the ownership of the costs of assessments, mainly because the employer's investments are in expanding the business.

What is also coming through very well in this study is that employers often prefer those applications with the highest qualification being matric. This assures them of the existence of some basic potential that they can work with them, and groom them into productive and committed employees. For most learning programmes in the health sector, i.e. nursing, pharmacy assistant, midwifery, etc.; those having a matric with life science and mathematics are prioritized since these occupations do need a foundation of such subjects.

The above discussion to a large degree indicates the appreciation and complementarity of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Employers want or prefer a balanced graduate with well-developed technical ability, emotional intelligence, communication skills, motivated team worker, integrity, leadership skills, ability and willingness to learn, etc. These clearly are a demonstration of a combination of both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

In a competitive environment with a huge shortage of technical skills (formal skills), employers are faced with a challenge which includes time and other resources. For employers, production imperatives and making returns on investment are essential. Hence employers are concerned about how best they can secure employees with adequate cognitive skills and execute socialization programmes that could guarantee organizational commitment.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The discussion above demonstrates that in addition to the need for basic cognitive and non-cognitive skills, there are other factors which emerge as key determinants for graduates recruitment and finally, absorption. Amongst these are the following:

- Availability of vacancies,
- Location, proximity to the production or service sites,
- Age (sometimes gender), and maturity,
- Previous initiative and experience, and
- Economic needs: scarce/desired skills.

Clearly, the need to recruit is the lead motivation for employers. Once they decide to recruit, they often look for employees closest to the workplace, to be guaranteed they such employees arrive on time.

Availability of vacancies

Availability of vacancies relates to growth or the expansion of the businesses, hence there would be a need to recruit more employees. This is one key determinant that encourages employers to look for talent and new skills. This indicates that employers have long realized that there is something each person can contribute to the workplace. Whether or not they have neither cognitive nor non-cognitive skills, where there are vacancies, they can be recruited (absorb learners/trainees), and orientated into product/service development.

Graduate Age, Gender, and Maturity

Most employers brought up the fact that matured employees have direct and immediate benefits to the organizations. Hence they are favored and preferred for employment. Matured employees have family responsibilities and are likely to have good social skills, good behavior and these are good foundations through which technical skills can be built on. For functionality, effectiveness, and efficiency, it is also understandable that employers would prefer to align certain roles with gender. For example, where older employees are put through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), they appreciate and feel indebtedness to the organization.

Graduate location and reliability

Employers' main objective is ensuring that their products or services are not disrupted by logistical arrangements of employees. The closer the employee is to the production or service site, the better. To avoid the burden of logistics such as relocating closer to work and consideration of the traveling costs, given the lack of effective public transport system and other issues such as crime (security), employers do worry about their employees and prefer them to be located closer to work.

Economic needs: scarce skills

In various economic cycles, there are specific skills that are needed to execute the specific function and this does influence the employer's choice of the kind of an employee they need and recruit. This is influenced by the skills that are needed by the economy and the sector. For example, trainees with basic mathematics, accounting, life sciences, and another technical background, stands trainees a good chance of being recruited and re-trained to fit the operational demands of the organization.

Previous experience: demonstration of initiative

This is where matured graduates have the advantage. Employers value the previous demonstration of willingness to work. In one way or the other, with age, matured graduates may have been exposed to the work environment. But for young graduates, employers still expect a demonstration of the willingness of the student and this is where volunteering work matters.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizational culture: invest in human capital development

The future of any organization hinges on having the relevant staff complement for expansion. Investing in human capital development should be made part of the organizational culture. As such, graduate recruitment and talent management should become an organizational tradition. The study demonstrates that employers have the burden to make new staff orientation and socialization part of the culture of the organization, to ensure organizational sustainability (innovation and transformation), and organizational resilience through securing employees commitment. Given the changes in the education system, competition for skills, and fluctuating levels in quality of training standards, it will benefit the organizations to make it their business to engage themselves in talent recruitment and management exercises to ensure that they

Functional Partnerships: Work Integrated Learning

For training providers to know the quality of the graduates they are producing, they would need to engage the employer and review performance assessments of the graduates. Both training providers and employers must take advantage of the factor that society now sees value in vocational training. Hence, any partnership that exists between them should enhance experiential training opportunities.

Predictive and Adaptive planning

As part of early interventions and being proactive, it might help the employers to invest aggressively in marketing their organizations to the youth while they are completing their basic education levels. Basic knowledge and understanding of what the labor market requires is likely to inspire and steer the learners towards careers in the future. This will increase the pool from which employers recruit from.

As the discussion above has explored the dynamics and implications involved in the consideration of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in the context of graduates transition from training into the workplace. This discussion has triggered some potential research and policy development questions, which may be investigated in the future; and these include the following:

- Within a predictive and adaptive planning approach, how best organizations can create adequate awareness (and fund) their skills needs.

SECTION 6: REFERENCES

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