

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO WORK READINESS

Issued by Perfect Word Consulting (Pty) Ltd

Skills development initiatives don't mean much in the workplace if real work readiness is not achieved. If the skills taught cannot be implemented by the employee at work, if they amount only to theoretical learning without practical application, will any return on investment be achieved?

According to Gizelle McIntyre, Director at The Institute of People Development work readiness programmes need to be well designed and implemented within a proper framework within an organisation. "This could include a curriculum that is made up of various programmes to encourage engagement, develop value based mind-sets and provide additional skills." This should focus on aspects such as: Fit for Purpose, i.e. mastery of the skill or functioning knowledge required for the workplace; Field Specific Knowledge, i.e. mastery of the body of knowledge linked to the job role; and Attitudes, Behaviours and Values, i.e. assimilation of the norms and values to allow the graduate to work professionally within the culture of the organisation.

Relevant skills programmes could include anything from Increasing Gratitude, to Building Self Esteem and Assertiveness Skills, Business Etiquette, Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace, Business Writing, Communication and Relationship Building Strategies, Public Speaking/Presentation Skills, Basic Administrative Skills, Time Management, Understanding Performance, Writing Reports and Proposals, Budgeting, How to Manage Conflict, Legislation, Business Ethics, Diversity Training, Safety in the Workplace, and all the relevant internal programmes of the organisation.

So how is work readiness achieved? "Simply put, work readiness is built into organisational strategy by providing the tools, methods, and processes to attract, select and support the new entrant through this transition," confirms McIntyre. "However, organisations in South Africa have to consider the local context. They need to take into account the vast unskilled labour pool, including the unemployed youth."

South Africa has the third highest unemployed youth figure in the world. This demographic comprises youth that do not have access to networks that connect people to workplaces. "They live in communities with high unemployment numbers, which makes the transition into the workplace more difficult, due to a lack of knowledge of work culture. As a result, they face poor economic growth prospects and are confused by the nature of work changing rapidly,"

laments McIntyre. “They endure a poor schooling system, and are millennials that have different priorities, are much more mobile, and will simply leave (even if they had a bursary) if the workplace can’t provide for their particular needs.” This results in a waste of bursary funds, with figures indicating that only 30 percent of bursary learners/employees are retained.

Good work readiness programmes benefit an organisation through instant productivity and engagement, the reduction of churn at all levels, more effective induction and orientation periods (on-boarding), and a better match between selected candidates and line expectations. “Optimisation of projected training expenditure, because new recruits are more work ready, is a huge bonus. The skills development component of the BBBEE scorecard is also placing a compliance focus on skills development and this, in terms of work readiness, may be an advantage.”

A benefit not often seen is the access to a large, untapped, disadvantaged talent pool which doesn’t have the networks to get work - but is potentially more committed, often more motivated, and more socially responsible (many plough their earnings and experience back into their communities). Providing internships, hosting learnerships, or offering other structured integration processes for bursary holders allows the organisation access to tax incentives, PIVOTAL and other skills development grants. This can also allow the organisation to brand itself as a socially responsible and engaged employer, or as an organisation that supports long-term sustainability of the organisation within its community.

McIntyre shares the fundamental requirements for good workplace readiness processes and programmes. Work readiness requires a *supportive learning culture*; novices are work ready when they can meaningfully contribute to the delivery of products or the provision of services in an organisational context. Work readiness practices should *support individual integration and productivity*. These practices should also *reflect the level of maturity* of the organisation in terms of learning and development culture; based on the type of learning ecosystem in the organisation. Creating *instant feedback systems*, where new recruits feel challenged or uncertain, is essential. Programmes should *build new recruits’ confidence*, and *build the capacity of line managers* to take a personal role in selecting and grooming their next generation of employees, while developing *transcendent learning ecosystems*.

“Progressive organisations are recognising that they can no longer operate as if they were a separate system,” concludes McIntyre. “They realise that they form part of the broader social and economic system. Their survival depends on them reading current tendencies and trends. Adapting their process is not just about being socially responsible; it is also being able to thrive

in the new economy by bringing in staff that can support a new generation of strategies, products and services - which will create a sustainable future and, at the same time, a workforce that thrives. It is not about being reactive, but being proactive in the face of a constantly changing world.”

- ENDS -

Boilerplate:

Founded in 1999, Workplace Skills Solutions t/a The Institute of People Development (IPD) strives to equip, prepare and certify practitioners to serve South Africa’s skills development strategy and facilitate the transformation of education and training. Over the years, IPD has become the preferred people development partner to most state owned and private enterprises in Southern Africa. IPD has assisted over 500 public and private training providers across most sectors of the economy to achieve or maintain accreditation through consulting, training and providing published guidelines. For more information, please contact IPD at trainingenquiries@peopledev.co.za on (011) 315 2913 or visit www.peopledevelopment.co.za.