MAKE THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ACT WORK FOR YOU

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Make the Skills Development Act work for you

As a busy HR manager or practitioner, you probably are bracing yourself for the annual grind of preparing your company's Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) and Annual Training Report (ATR) for submission to your SETA.

This is very often a tedious exercise that requires scraps of information to be gathered from various sources. Quite often the systems you have in place are not focused on skills development information and are merely employee databases.

Does this sound familiar?

On top of this, the Department of Labour needs your annual Employment Equity report; your CEO wants the latest data on how many company learners and apprentices have qualified in the past year and your Marketing department wants to brag about the company's contribution to skills development initiatives.

It seems that every time you do a head count using your payroll system, the numbers change and you have to dig out from personnel records a list of those who went on training last year.

Preparing the annual Employment Equity report can also be a headache, as there are often discrepancies in the data as technology-based systems do not always provide the required information. This results in the HR department having to rely on paper-based systems such as personnel records to fill the gaps.

Can't your HR system do this for you?

What HR system, you say? Many smaller organisations use their payroll system as a basis to record employee information, but this is nothing more than a collection of contact details and financial/tax information.
Larger organisations may use one of the better known HR management systems, but again, these are not designed with skills development issues in mind and cannot be easily modified to meet the ever changing regulatory and compliance requirements of the skills development agencies.

**Why keep re-inventing the wheel?**

Why not make use of the information that is recorded on your WSP and ATR to do the work for you? All it takes is a systematic approach, a record of all your employees and regular updating of training & development initiatives.

If you have a few employees, an Excel spreadsheet with pivot tables could do this for you. You would have access to the raw data immediately and could respond to queries straight away. The disadvantage is that you would not be able to generate reports and run ad-hoc queries on the data.

A more effective way if you have 50 or more employees is to keep a record of all employees and their skills, qualifications and development initiatives in a simple database that allows to run standard reports and queries on any or all aspects of:

- Skills development levies paid
- Grants received
- Employment equity
- Personal development plans
- Skills development programmes
- Learners & apprentices
- Appropriate training providers
- Appropriate training programmes
- Assessors and moderators
- Skills development facilitators

This database would generate your WSP, ATR and EE reports at the push of a button, assuming that your records are up to date.
You will find that someone in your company is an “Excel wizard” who can set up a simple system that allows all this information to be captured and manipulated to produce basic reports. A database requires more skill, and you may find in such skills in a larger organisation. Your IT department may be able to help you or you may need to purchase a bespoke Skills Development system.

**Treat the WSP as a “living” skills development plan**

The workplace skills plan should not be viewed as a document that needs to be completed annually to conform to bureaucratic compliance, but rather as a living document that is updated regularly. This is the company snapshot of its skills, and is as valuable as the company’s balance sheet.

As payroll costs are usually the largest element of a company’s expenses, an accurate, up-to-date WSP should show the investment made by the company in its employees.

**Get a better return on your investment in your employees**

Use this process to maximise the financial benefits due to your company, while at the same time keeping track of the skills development of each individual employee. There are many benefits to having ready access to this information, such as:-

- Ensuring you claim all grants that are due to the company
- WSP’s, ATR’s and Employment Equity reports at the push of a button
- A “live” record of all employees skills, qualifications and training needs
- A company training plan and budget

A little bit of planning and preparation will go a long way to eliminate the annual reporting hassle, and will give you much needed information throughout the year.