

DECLARATION

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Date: 06 February 2014

ABSTRACT

According to Van Scheers (2010, p. 1) small businesses constitute 55% of the employment rate in South Africa. The argument that in the future new jobs are more likely to come from a large number of small businesses than from a small number of large businesses (Martin, 2001, p. 189) has challenged the South African government to support the empowerment of small business. The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA) was formed as part of the governmental plan to ensure quality-learning provision within the wholesale and retail sector. The training of employees within small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector is not adequate (Mokgata, 2009, p. 4), despite the various methods of training funded by the W&R SETA. The small business unit at the W&R SETA introduced the Voucher-training System. Small levy paying businesses in this sector receive a voucher or vouchers that can be used to access free training opportunities for staff. Providers accredited with the W&R SETA are allowed to offer training programmes that suit the education and training needs of the sector. Companies pay the provider with the free vouchers they are allocated by the SETA. The scope of the Small Business Voucher-training System is to offer short courses that provide skills with immediate effect on the small businesses. The focus of this study grew out of the need to know if the voucher-training programmes meet the needs of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector. In order to determine whether the voucher-training programmes meet the needs of the small business sector, the small business managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programme are essential in order to develop insights into the possible improvements and sustainability of the programme.

A descriptive research study from an interpretivist perspective is used to understand the perceptions of the small business managers of the voucher programmes. A case study design was used and forms the basis of this study. Interviews were used to elicit qualitative data that provide insights into small business managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programme.

The reasons small business managers gave explaining why they selected specific programmes for employees indicate the influence the training had on employees and their future progression and development within their company. It showed how the company itself benefited from the employees involvement in these programmes and lists the most appropriate programme for these small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector. The small business managers' reflections on any changes in their employees' behaviour after the employee attended the voucher-training programme ranged from positive behaviours which they noticed to poor or no influence from the training interventions on employee behaviours at all. The learning programmes small business managers noted as essential in furthering the development of their employees are programmes that suit the respondents in this study. These insights are important in order to understand the type of programmes needed by small business managers in determining the further training needs for their employees in the wholesale and retail sector. The respondents shared various insights, from

their personal experience after they had sent employees on the learning programmes, on how they felt the voucher programme system could be improved. The insights these small business managers provide on how to possibly improve the voucher-training programme indicate a thorough knowledge of their business and operational requirements which the SETA and providers need to pay careful attention to should this programme continue.

KEYWORDS: voucher-training programme, small business managers, Wholesale & Retail SETA, Workplace learning, perceptions.

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My sincerest appreciation goes to my husband, for his continuous support and patience during my studies. I have no words...

My sincere thanks and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Liezel Frick for taking me to the edge with this research study and beyond.

"Come to the edge!" he said.

They said, "We are afraid!"

"Come to the edge!" he said.

They came.

He pushed them...

and they flew.

- Guillaume Appolinaire

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION INTO THE STUDY

1. 1INTRODUCTION

Small businesses do not seem to have a long life span. The National Small Business Act 102 of 1996 (1996, p. 2) describes a small business as a business entity that employs less than fifty people. According to Van Scheers (2010, p. 1), 40% of new business ventures fail in their first year, 60% fail in their second year and 90% fail in the first ten years of their existence. This high failure rate maybe due to clients thinking that small businesses lack the ability to provide quality services and that they are unable to manage more than one project at a time. Larger companies are therefore chosen by clients and given the business because of their recognition and perceived stability (Bowen, Morara & Mureithi, 2009, p. 16). Clients also see small businesses as unreliable because of their small staff numbers and not strong enough to manage their business. These perceptions may contribute to the demise of the small business.

The value of these small businesses, however, must not be underestimated in that they constitute 55% of the employment rate in South Africa (Van Scheers, 2010, p. 1). The South African government has tried to promote this sector to alleviate unemployment (Mafiri, 2002, p. 69). Empowering the small business sector to ensure their survival has been a constant challenge to the South African Government. The Wholesale and Retail Sector, Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA) was formed as part of the governmental plan to ensure quality learning provision within the wholesale and retail sector. One of their objectives was to focus on the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to provide future employment opportunities in the sector (W&R SETA, 2011, p. 1). One of their biggest challenges was how to address the needs of the small business sector (W&R SETA, 2010/2011, p. 5). The training of employees within small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector is not adequate (Mokgata, 2009, p. 4), despite the various methods of training funded by the W&R SETA. Mokgata suggests that factors such as a small workforce in these businesses, lack of training funds within the company and training periods that do not match the small business off-peaks make it difficult for training to occur. It is therefore important to look at ways in which to facilitate education and training in small businesses.

In response to the South African National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) 11 (Department of Labour, 2005, p. 8), which also supports the empowerment of small businesses, the small business unit at the W&R SETA introduced the Voucher-training System. Small levy paying businesses in this sector receive a voucher or vouchers that can be used to access free training opportunities for staff. The scope of the Small Business Voucher-training System is to offer short courses that provide skills with immediate effect on the small businesses, and within the priority skill areas of Computer Literacy, Financial Management, Merchandising, Sales Skills, HIV/AIDS

Training, Time Management, Customer Care, Small Business Management and Negotiation Skills. This programme was also later opened to non-levy paying small wholesale and retail companies. Providers accredited with the W&R SETA are allowed to offer training programmes that suit the education and training needs of the sector. Companies pay the provider with the free vouchers they are allocated by the SETA. I have been a registered skills development facilitator, verifier, external moderator and a sector liaison officer for W&R SETA for the past eight years. The SETA thus granted me access to various wholesale and retail stakeholders to fulfil the roles granted to me by the SETA. The small business managers have already had staff participate in the voucher programme. As I am the registered Skills Development Facilitator for these small businesses, feedback on the voucher programmes is standard, even if it is not done officially by the W&R SETA themselves.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The focus of this study grew out of the need to know if the voucher-training programmes described above are meeting the needs of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector. In order to determine whether the voucher-training programmes meet the needs of the small business sector, the managers' perceptions of the voucher programmes are imperative.

The W&R SETA has praised the voucher-training programme and deemed it a complete success. This can be seen in the W&R SETA Annual Report (2010/2011, p. 8), which lists the performance of the SETA against the National Skills Development Strategy 11 (NSDS 11) objectives. Success indicator (2.2) of the NSDS 11 states that by March 2011, skills development in at least 40% of small levy paying firms must have been supported and the impact of the support measured. The SETA reported that whilst the number of small levy paying firms targeted for support for the 2010/11 financial year was 3 307 small businesses, they actually supported 4 444 small businesses (W&R SETA, 2010/2011, p. 8). The report further states that the SETA received an unqualified audit report by the Auditor General for the past 10 years, was awarded the Good Practice in Skills Development by the Minister of Labour in 2008, paid over R469 million in grants to small companies and supported over 870 small and BEE firms (W&R SETA, 2010/2011, p. 5).

On paper, these results are impressive. There is, however, no current measurement of the success of the voucher-training programme other than the number of people who participate and the workshop feedback forms private providers have used. These feedback forms reflect the quality of the training workshop but do not give an indication of the managers' perceptions of the lifelong learning experiences the employees might have gained. The concept of human capital theory argues the assumption that formal education is necessary to improve the productivity in the workforce of a population. Education here however is seen as an economic factor necessary for economic and social transformation and does not focus on the lifelong learning experiences of the employees (Almendarez, 2011, p. 1). The perceptions of small business managers are important to

gain a holistic understanding as these managers ultimately decide who should attend these training interventions, and whether these programmes are suitable for their staff as they are already familiar with their business and employees' needs. Employees may attend the training interventions offered by the SETA, but whether their managers think these training interventions are able to grow their employees in terms of their lifelong learning is unclear. The perceptions of managers may provide insights to supplement the current measurement of the number of small businesses that participated in the voucher-training programme as listed by the SETA. The perceptions of the managers are important for the sustainability of the voucher programme in the small business workplace in order to develop insights about possible improvements to the voucher-training programme.

1.3 RESEARCH STATEMENT

The small business managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programme are essential in order to develop insights into the possible improvements and sustainability of the programme.

1.3.1 Research question

How do the managers of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector perceive of the voucher-training programme?

1.3.2 Research aim

The aim of this study is to investigate perceptions of small business managers of the voucher-training programme offered by the W&R SETA in order to develop insights into the possible improvements of the voucher-training programme.

1.3.3 Research objectives

The study aims to:

- identify the rationale of managers for selecting training programmes;
- describe the managers' perceptions of the possible effects of the training interventions on behaviour of the employees;
- identify managers' perceptions of further training needs for employees; and
- explore managers' insights about possible improvements to the voucher-training programme.

1.3.4 Research design

A descriptive research study from an interpretivist perspective is used to understand the perceptions of the small business managers of the voucher programmes. A case study design was used and forms the basis of this study. Interviews were used to elicit qualitative data that provide insights into small business managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programme.

1.4 POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study intends to add to current research that focuses on lifelong learning within small business development in South Africa. My primary focus will be on how the Voucher-training System used by the W&R SETA is perceived by the small business managers. The results of the study may assist small business managers determine the type of training programmes they may want to send their employees on. This may help the W&R SETA to determine the needs of small business and thereby maintain or revise the strategy ahead for small business development within the sector based on the managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programmes. The study may furthermore inform providers of training in the W&R sector on the type of training interventions they could offer small businesses. The study may stimulate further debate amongst stakeholders and research in this area to reflect on the importance of evaluation of the voucher-training system other than just a paper-based and number-driven activity. The perceptions of small business managers on the effectiveness of the voucher-training programme are crucial to providing guidelines for the improvement of the voucher-training system as part of an encompassing evaluative process.

1.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical research is concerned with ensuring that the rights of the participants are respected and that participants are not abused or violated in the search for knowledge, scientific inquiry or for career advancement (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2007, p. 294). It is the application of a particular standard of conduct or behaviour to a specific situation or decision. A code of ethics is therefore necessary to define any good business practise and standards of conduct in the education, training and development (EDT) profession. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Stellenbosch. Informed consent is an ethical requirement for all research studies (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007, p. 77). Written, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study and the importance of their contribution as stakeholders in the wholesale and retail sector. They were also informed that their participation would be entirely voluntary and would not result in any withdrawal of benefits from the SETA. The small business managers were asked to complete a consent form, which emphasised their voluntary participation and assured them that issues such as confidentiality and their anonymity would be respected. Transcripts of the interviews and all confidential material were kept in a private place of storage and remain the responsibility of the researcher.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS

The quest to determining the effectiveness of the voucher-training programme lay fully with the perceptions of the small business managers who have used this system. Their perceptions and insights are essential for understanding their rationale for the selection of training programmes, to

describing the effects of the training interventions on employee behaviour and to identifying further training needs for their employees. Their insights may provide invaluable suggestions for the possible improvements to the voucher-training programme.

The collated data reported in this 50% mini-thesis will be presented in five chapters. An overview of these preliminary chapters is provided:

Chapter one: Orientation into the study

This chapter will explain the rationale for the study, the research statement and the possible contributions of the study in order to determine whether the voucher-training programmes meet the needs of the small business sector.

Chapter two: Literature overview

The literature overview will discuss the importance of context driven workplace learning programmes and show that the challenges and benefits experienced by small businesses are not unique to just South Africa.

Chapter three: Research design and methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methods utilised that served as a blueprint for the empirical component of the study.

Chapter four: Results and discussion

The results of the data collection and analysis are reported in this chapter.

Chapter five: Conclusions and implications

The conclusions on the managers' perceptions of the voucher programme and possible implications thereof for policy and practice will be discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Small business managers are generally systematic, hard working and practical (Jeffrey, Hide & Legg, 2009, p. 146). They are exposed to constant changes in the workplace and are expected to adapt and be flexible, as are their employees. Constant technological changes force both managers and employees to learn, unlearn and relearn. Small business managers prefer less formal modes of training for their employees in the workplace. Workplace learning then should take place through normal workplace practises and should be seen as a holistic process in that it requires employees to have a specific type of learning and identification with their work that forms their work identities (Collin, 2007, p. 152). It is against this background that this chapter focuses on positioning education and training within the small business sector in South Africa and the contribution of workplace learning (WPL).

The chapter starts by interrogating workplace learning as a holistic experience (section 2.2), and continues to position this concept within the notions of formal and informal modes of learning. Workplace learning is then interrogated from a socio-political perspective (section 2.3), before it is discussed within the context of specifically small businesses and the challenges faced within these organisations (sections 2.4 and 2.5 respectively). The benefits of workplace learning within small businesses warrant attention within the overview of relevant literature, which is reported in section 2.6.

2.2 WORKPLACE LEARNING AS A HOLISTIC EXPERIENCE

Learning in the workplace is an active and participative process in which employees improve their performance at work by doing daily work activities. Work activities may require them to interact with employees, customers, and tools and may furthermore encourage them to think in ways that are appropriate to the business (Bamber & O'Shea, 2009, p. 337). Such work activities demand that their learning becomes a social and an interactive experience where knowledge is not just received but is seen through reflection as these employees are engaged with real problems within their work context (Bamber & O'Shea, 2009, p. 337).

Employees' learning experiences are often diverse. They learn all aspects of their job, how to do it, how to relate to their fellow workers, supervisors and employers. They also learn how the nature of their job influences society itself. Often what they learn may have little to do with their work itself, as one cannot assume that all their learning at work is related just to the work (Spencer, 2009, p. 296). Employees in a workplace need to feel that their knowledge counts and is regarded as valuable. If their memories, emotions, experiences and everyday knowledge are regarded as

irrelevant, if their identities are ignored, then we live in an inhuman society (Harnsten & Rosen, 2009, p. 231). Hence work, learning and identities are closely intertwined in WPL.

Learning at work is not a new phenomenon (Spencer, 2007, p. 796). The practices of work related learning and concepts of knowledge and learning can not be fully understood unless an understanding of the relations that underpin these concepts are examined (Cooper & Walters, 2009, p. X11). Sawchuk and Kempf (2009, p. 154) argue that work and learning relationships are strongly shaped by cultural, political and economic histories. They site the cases of guest worker programmes. This refers to the importation of temporary labour under specific conditions. The results of the guest worker programmes in Canada describes how the experiences of guest workers influences employers, government agencies, hosts and origin communities, organisers and the workers themselves in that it teaches not just skills and knowledge necessary for the work, but also shows how the experiences of guest workers shape their learning and development in their hosts countries. Their learning and development can be linked to the concept of 'practical wisdom' (Breier, 2009, p. 182).

Aristotle presents the concept of *phronesis*, which is often translated as practical wisdom (Breier, 2009, p. 182). It is a form of reasoning and understanding. In WPL, recognition is given to the practical wisdom of workers by acknowledging that such knowledge exists. Respect is given to workers who have not had the opportunities or any of the advantages of formal education but have managed to survive under the harshest conditions in a way that few of the formally educated would have been able to (Breier, 2009, p. 191). These workers have learned to manage their emotional responses to the often difficult situations in which they may have found themselves. Field and Malcolm (2009, p. 179) maintain that being good at managing one's emotions becomes an important part of who people believe themselves to be and provides a basis for their self-reflection of their professionalism and self-respect. It must be noted that workers in general try to make meaning out of their work experience. It is difficult for a worker to work eight hours a day, five or six days a week without emotion. Workers in generally want to do a good job – even if it is menial work (Spencer, 2009, p. 297).

Emotional labour has vast implications for workplace and adult learning. Field and Malcolm (2009, p. 172) question whether emotional competencies are skills and whether they can be deliberately taught and learned in adult life. They argue that skilled emotion workers are aware of their ability to manage their emotions in the workplace and see it as part of their professionalism, which in turn promotes a high standard of performance from them. Emotion work combines aspects of formal, informal and non-formal learning (Field & Malcolm, 2009, p. 180). Workers actively engage with their world. This in turn affects workers views and performance in the workplace which helps them handle change and learning across their lives. WPL should thus move toward a more interactive and practical form of instruction, so the significance of emotion work and emotional labour increases (Field & Malcolm, 2009, p. 179).

Managers are thus motivated to take the employees' well being into account so as to assist them to build a satisfying balance between work and other areas of life and to become more productive in the work force (Collin, 2007, p. 152). Managers recognise that WPL addresses organisational issues, which brings value to both the employee and the organisation, as it would take place at work, reduce the time employees would need to take time off to attend training and deliver individual learning. WPL allows employees to develop and improve their people relations and understand how their particular job influences the workplace and the global world (Spencer, 2007, p. 796). Learning done at work can provide a richer experience for both the employee and the organisation (Bibby, 2007, p. 67). To grow, an organisation must build its strength internally, especially with the employees. An organisation cannot build its strength outside if it cannot build strength at home (Bhattacharjee, 2009, p. 152).

The central focus in work and learning is always the workplace. Hodkinson (2007, p. 395) argues that it is important to understand workplace learning within the context of a person's whole life. Working and learning at work must be seen in conjunction with the person's whole life, which encompasses their family, community, and social lives where learning also takes place. WPL in this sense can be seen as part of lifelong learning or, as Hodkinson calls it, the "life course" (2007, p. 395). Conceptualising the role of WPL in organisations such as small businesses is important in understanding how education and training initiatives (such as the voucher-training programme referred to in this study) function.

If the starting point of learning is the organisation, then theoretical learning acquired through traditional programmes could be difficult to apply in the workplace (Bibby, 2007, p. 67). Grosjean (2007, p. 300) states that although theoretical knowledge gained from an academic environment is important; the need for a knowledge-in-practise type of learning is essential. He refers to theoretical learning gained from academic institutions as Mode 1 learning and knowledge gained in a practical environment as Mode 2 learning. The theoretical learning gained at formal academic institutions is not, however, limited to Mode 1 learning as there is a move toward Mode 2 learning as well. Mode 2 learning is seen as a context-driven, holistic form of knowledge and relates to learning outside formal institutions. Mode 2 learning engages personality, intellectual and craft skills (Rochford, 2007, p. 708). This type of learning is not just about learning in the workplace but about taking it further into a lifelong learning experience (Jonsson, 2007, p. 480). Mode 3 learning, on the other hand, is derived from the learners' own initiative (Grosjean, 2007, p. 300). Workers who experience the Mode 2 form of learning have holistic skills, which make them more flexible and versatile and able to cope with the work environment.

Grosjean (2007, p. 300) uses the term "co-op" work to describe people who can fit into organisations quickly because they have such holistic skills. He refers to cooperative education as a type of work integrated learning that provides a timely response to the increasing demand for education relevant to the global economy.

Learning that is taken outside of the formal structures of classes and courses and regulations is referred to as informal learning. Because of its lack of formal structures, informal learning is often seen as an under valued and under supported mode of adult learning (Turc & Smaller, 2009, p. 126). Turc and Smaller (2009, p. 126) define informal learning as explicit in that knowledge, understanding or skills employees acquire are of their own initiative. Becoming an adaptable and flexible employee becomes the responsibility of the individual worker who has to maintain his place in this ever-changing global economy.

WPL then is generally focussed on learning associated with work activities that are both formal and informal in nature. Managers ensure that employees take on industry related training, courses and programmes. These training initiatives are useful to managers and results in workers learning new skills and knowledge. Spencer (2009, p. 296) argues that some of the learning programmes can also be criticised for being narrowly manager focussed because they are more concerned with tying employees to a particular manager than with giving employees holistic, generic and portable skills. Learning then should be embedded in everyday practises (Fenwick, 2010, p. 151). This makes the perceptions and insights of the small business managers, into how effective they deem the voucher programmes to be on their employees, essential as they see the everyday work practises of their employees.

2.3 WORKPLACE LEARNING FROM A SOCIO-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Nicoll (2007, p. 644) discusses how the global economy influences workplace learning. She refers to the actor-network theory in describing a move away from the psychological approaches to understanding individualised knowledge building to a more social and cultural interpretation thereof. Political, cultural, social and economic aspects all influence learning in South Africa. When studying workplace learning, it is essential that these aspects be taken into consideration (Walters & Watters, 2001, p. 100).

International workplace learning research, however, does not focus on the needs of underdeveloped or slowly developing countries (Boughton, 2007, p. 75). Boughton questions how the people of Timor-Leste can get the work skills they need when they still need to find a pathway out of poverty. He argues that Timor-Leste needs to build a workforce that can put the country on a path to growth and prosperity. It is difficult to explore theories of workplace learning when the population in a country still have to learn how to overcome exploitation. Thus, teaching people to recognise exploitation and how to overcome this must be included in the workplace learning agenda (Boughton, 2007, p. 81). So too, in South Africa, teaching people who were exploited and abused through the system of apartheid is imperative and should be part of the workplace learning experience. Walters (1996, in Boughton, 2007) argues that South African businesses had to face the challenge of improving productivity and livelihoods whilst at the same time deal with the aftermath of apartheid. In situations such as this, there needs to be continuous discourse between

government and the workplace on how to maintain an on going education and training system as it is easy in the aftermath of democracy for education practises, especially in small businesses, to be ignored.

Tlhomola, Rankhumise and Van Niekerk (2010, p. 5) argue that after the democratic elections in 1994, the government in South Africa supported small businesses, and still do, through the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) with initiatives such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA). Most entrepreneurs are, however, not aware of the support government is offering (p. 24). This is particularly true of the voucher-training programme offered by the W&R SETA in that the small business managers are not aware of the education and training initiatives offered by government. Indeed one of the objectives of the voucher-training system was to establish, develop and continue to improve communication channels between the W&R SETA and the SMMEs in the sector by offering flexibility of WPL (Mokgata, 2009, p. 2).

Mojab (2009, p. 5) rejects the governments' support for developing skills in the workplace. She argues that the notion of training and retraining workers to be ultimately adaptable and responsible for their own learning in a democratic society, deflects the responsibility of government and the real need for social and economic reform. She sites Coffield's argument that lifelong learning on its own will not resolve a wide range of social, political and educational issues (2009, p. 6). Coffield (1999), she argues, states that lifelong learning is used as an excuse to spend money and take action. In this way government is seen as being proactive and deflects the attention from the need for social and economic reform (Mojab, 2009, p. 6). She also discusses human capital theory and its impact on lifelong learning. Human capital theory assumes that people with better schooling end up with better jobs. Their schooling and education also makes them versatile and adaptable to employability within the company. In an ever-changing working environment, were employees have to adapt to global changes, the employees who can adapt and who are flexible are retained. This makes it easy for managers to exploit staff who cannot adapt as easily and who do menial labour. Cheap labour is disposable and does not require employers to use capital. Capital, on the other hand, is needed to up-skill and retain staff with specific labour skills (Mojab, 2009, p. 7). Mojab (2009, p. 12) argues that lifelong learning is for the purpose of training skilled labour and delivering it to a capitalist market.

Von Kotze (2009, p. 17) notes how the role of the state in education and training interventions in general has decreased. One of the reasons she provides is the increasing changes in learning and the impossibility of designing a curriculum that is suitable for all learners who come from radically different backgrounds (2009, p. 17). She states that the informal economy is growing and the contributions of income from informal work to national income amounts to between 30 and 60 per cent in different countries (2009, p. 19). The priority for education and training is human resource development, which is assessable to those in the know and already in the system. Market conditions favour the provision of learning programmes that target people who want to invest in

themselves (Von Kotze, 2009, p. 17). She argues that education, learning and work relationships must be more than mere processes and must stand within a framework of practical living (2009, p. 28).

A common argument given, according to Von Kotze (2009, p. 18), is that people are unemployed because they lack skills, self-esteem and self-confidence. They are then offered life skills to alter their behaviour and skills training to make them more employable. In order to improve their positions within the economy, individualising them as the target of personal development is not as effective as linking them to new networks in which they can learn about new technologies and new markets (Von Kotze, 2009, p. 19). The value of small businesses can thus be seen in that they can provide networks that allow employees to learn about new technologies and new markets.

2.4 WORKPLACE LEARNING AND SMALL BUSINESSES

SMEs are uninterested in formal learning and prefer the flexibility of WPL. They prefer the flexibility of using consultants and informal learning strategies to acquire new knowledge, as sending employees on formal training programmes is seen as too expensive (Svensen, 2007, p. 814). Furthermore, the imbalances between the informality of WPL within SMEs and the formal educational system lead to SMEs often being in a subordinate position because of the lack of formality of their learning programmes. Traditionally, theoretical knowledge has a perceived higher value than practical skills (Svensen, 2007, p. 814). These discrepant values influence power relations between institutions that offer formal learning programmes and WPL. Svensson (2007, p. 814) looks at ways in which the power relations can be balanced between SMEs and the formal system of education. The aim is ultimately to promote workplace learning, find factors that strengthen the workplace system, and contribute to a joint system of learning and development between institutions that offer formal learning and the informal learning that takes place in the workplace.

One of the factors that strengthen SMEs is the role of managers in the day-to-day running of the small business and their hands on approach to workplace learning. This is essential for the planning and organising phases of learning and helps to even the power imbalance in the relationship between informal WPL and the formal learning system. However, the role of the managers is not always positive in that training may not be seen as a priority and therefore not part of the strategic planning of the organisation (Svensen, 2007, p. 815). Learning is often seen as a service to be delivered within which the manager does not need to get involved. Another imbalance is seen in the programme development of learning initiatives. Developing a learning programme is seen as the responsibility of the provider. Joint development of the intended learning programme by managers may facilitate learning at all levels of the organisation (Svensen, 2007, p. 815).

2.5 WORKPLACE LEARNING AND SMALL BUSINESS CHALLENGES

The challenges identified by Martin (2001) are also familiar to the South African context. The United Kingdom (UK) Department of Trade and Industry and various other government departments acknowledged the role of SMEs in the development of the UK economy (p. 190). Martin sites the importance of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, as saying, “in the future new jobs are more likely to come from a large number of small businesses than from a small number of large businesses” (p. 189).

Small business managers bending rules in order to access government funding or grants because the paperwork was too intense, government agencies not paying attention to these issues as they too had targets to meet for government, all echo how the small businesses and their regulating bodies cope with managing workplace learning opportunities. If regulating bodies did not spend the money during the financial year then less money would be forthcoming from government in the following year. The government would not want to provide extra funds to regulating bodies if the money allocated the previous year was not utilised properly (Martin, 2001, p. 192). This reflects some of the challenges experienced by small businesses and regulating bodies such as the W&R SETA in South Africa.

The research report presented by The Centre for Workplace Skills in Canada (2011) also mirrors other economic and demographic challenges SMEs face in South Africa – even though it is a country with a much more well-developed economy than South Africa. In Canada there is a need to keep updated with new technology, changing customer expectations and the need to offer more competitive trade and keep up to date with global trends. Regulatory changes from government, the lack of skilled workers, the skills gap between what workers need and what they have, increasing diversity in the workplace all contribute to the challenges SMEs face in Canada (The Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011, p. 7). This also seems to be the case in South Africa. SMEs also often do not have a dedicated human resource team, hence they tend to move away from training and development of staff (The Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011, p. 9). Further, the costs of workplace learning programmes can be significant for smaller business with limited finances. Small business managers therefore get themselves certified through external training then go back to the workplace to train staff. Investing time in training or workplace learning is not always possible because small business managers tend to focus on the operational aspects of running their businesses and they have no specific staff dedicated to running training programmes (The Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011, p. 16).

2.6 BENEFITS OF WORKPLACE LEARNING IN SMALL BUSINESSES

Workplace learning may help businesses to become more profitable and competitive, the quality of work may improve and there is an overall improvement in workplace culture and morale. Employees become more confident, are team players, produce quality work and enjoy their jobs

(The Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, companies that invest in training or workplace learning have a lower turnover rate than those who spend less on training or workplace learning.

According to the report put out by The Centre for Workplace Skills (2011), SMEs also benefit in workplace learning by taking advantage of internships or other placement programmes. SMEs motivate staff by celebrating employee accomplishments by handing out awards, certificates or financial incentives. Employees are motivated to work in teams, thereby encouraging commitment to learning and peer support. Involving employees in the design and implementation of the workplace learning programme allows employees to take ownership of SMEs (Martin, 2001, p. 191).

2.7 CONCLUSION

The execution of a WPL programme within South African small businesses requires the inputs of not just the government or regulating bodies, but input from the small business managers and employees, as well as higher education institutions. Input from all stakeholders on the quality of learning programmes will result in a WPL experience that is effective, customised to the business and holistic in its approach. Currently, however, this does not seem to be the case (see section 1.2 in chapter 1, which outlines the motivation for this study). This study therefore aimed to investigate a small group of SME managers' perceptions of a particular training intervention – the voucher-training programme launched by the W&R SETA – in order to contribute to a more holistic understanding of employees' lifelong learning within SME settings. The following chapter (chapter 3) will outline how this was done.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research is an exploration, a discovery and the careful study of unexplained phenomena (Brink, Van der Walt & Van Rensburg, 2007, p. 2). This chapter will discuss the research design and methodology used to investigate the perceptions of small business managers of the voucher-training programme. The research design and methodology was used to find an answer to the research question of how do the managers of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector perceive the voucher-training programme.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

This research study used a case study design within the interpretive research paradigm. The study explored people's perceptions and interpretation of objects and events around them based on their personal experience (Steinburg, 2009, p. 60) – in this study the perceptions of small business managers regarding the voucher-training programme. The truth therefore lies within the human experience and is always context bound. From an ontological perspective, interpretivists believe that reality is a social construct (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p. 29). The epistemological assumption then is that knowledge is subjective, because it is socially constructed. The purpose of this descriptive research study from the interpretivists' perspective is to understand the human experience and the perceptions of the small business managers on the voucher-training programmes in terms of their employees' lifelong learning.

A case study design is often used when there is a new phenomenon about which there is not much information, such as the case of the voucher programme. It is an in-depth study involving an individual or a small group of individuals (Brink *et al.*, 2007, p. 110). Struwig and Stead (2010, p. 8) maintain that case studies are conducted to identify three features. The first are features that are common to all case studies, the second are features that are not common to all case studies but show a relationship with certain case groups, and the third is to be able to identify features that are unique to specific cases. This research study fits into the third feature as specific aspects of the small business managers' perceptions are identified in order to determine their perceptions of the influences of the voucher-training programme on their employees. Researchers can use a number of approaches for the collection of data when using the case study design. Questionnaires, interviews, observations and written extracts by respondents are some of the approaches that can be used to collect data when using the case study design. Interviews were used in this study, and the rationale for this choice is explained in the next section.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

My research focus grew out of the need to know if the voucher training programmes are making a difference and helping employees in small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector in anyway. I am familiar with many of these companies as I have been their skills development facilitator for more than five years. I have seen their perceptions change from scepticism and weariness at any SETA intervention to a more accommodating nature. I have also observed how many private providers implement the voucher programme and have at times, participated in these initiatives. My decision to focus on small businesses in particular is a result of my affiliation to the SETA and the access it allows me to their workplace and employers. Methodology specifies how researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known (Terre Blanche et al. 2007, p. 6). The methodological question according to Voca (2004, p. 1) would be: how can the researcher go about finding out whatever she/he believes can be known. I believed that as the researcher, the best way to approach this research project would be to meet with the small business managers directly and discuss their perceptions of the voucher-training programme on their employees. My reasoning was based on the fact that I had already developed a professional working relationship with them and knew that setting up meetings with each is difficult as they are always busy. From my previous experience, I knew that I would have to fit in with their schedules. Education and training initiatives, even if at no cost to these small organisation, was not their core interest, hence, meetings with me and discussions about training were not prioritised. If I needed anything, I would need to go to them directly and fit into their work schedules. My experiences with many small business managers over the years have taught me to expect constant interruptions and it is a constant battle to focus the small business managers' attention on any aspect of skills development. Further, because of the constant interruptions, which I expected, I knew that my interview questions needed to be focussed and specific and that I was not to deviate from them if I hoped to achieve consistency in the quality of my questioning and results. Asking questions telephonically was not an option because of the constant interruptions, sending in questions to be answered via email was not an option because it would simply not be done.

Data gathering techniques are selected depending on the nature of the research design, the research problem and the respondents. Chilisa and Preece (2005, p. 30) list interviews, observations, personal and official documents, and informal conversations as some of the techniques that can be used.

Interviews were used to collect the data and the results were sorted on the basis of their similarities and or dissimilarities. This indicates the various ways in which people observe, perceive, experience or conceptualise certain aspects and are mapped out accordingly (Struwig & Stead, 2010, p. 15). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. This is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews (Struwig & Stead, 2010, p. 98) in that even though pre-determined questions were set and addressed in a systematic and consistent manner,

respondents still had the opportunity to discuss matters beyond the questions and give varied and detailed responses.

A semi-structured interview guide was designed based on the objectives of the study and a review of relevant concepts in the literature (see annexure A). Questions asked related to the small business managers' rationale for selecting specific training programmes, their perceptions of the effects these programmes on the behaviour of employees who had attended, and identification of the further training needs of their employees. Their perceptions form the basis for the findings reported in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

3.4 SAMPLE PROCEDURES

The target group for this study was small business managers within the wholesale and retail sector in the Western Cape. Small businesses in this scenario employ less than fifty people within the company and the business managers could be directors, senior managers or management members of the small business. These businesses should also have accessed the funds offered by the W&R SETA through the voucher-training programme.

The sampling procedures used focused on the depth and quality of the data, therefore I selected samples purposefully rather than randomly (Struwig & Stead, 2010, p. 121). My sample comprised of fourteen small business managers who were registered stakeholders in the W&R sector at the time of the study. They would have used the voucher programme at least once within the past three years prior to the study. This study focused specifically on the period from 2010 to 2012. The voucher programme was run at least twice during this period by the SETA.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Before analysing the data, all interview transcripts was downloaded from the digital recorder and typed verbatim. Responses were not rephrased to be grammatically correct. If raw data is summarised they no longer become raw data or the original idea (Struwig & Stead, 2010, p. 169). Hard copy transcripts were used to analyse the data. The procedure used to organise the data into categories was open coding (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p. 172). This is the process of interpreting data by breaking down words or phrases in the transcripts into themes or concepts to form a meaningful finding from all the data collected. The advantage of using such a coding procedure is that it is easy to change which sections should go under which themes or even change the themes completely whilst still keeping it linked to the research problem (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007, p. 325). When similar codes are found throughout the transcripts, a strong case for the credibility of the research findings can be made (Chilisa & Preece, 2005, p. 172). Finally, an interpretation of what was found was collated and checked in order to ensure that the data was not just summarised or overanalysed.

3.6 ETHICAL ASPECTS

All participants in the study were informed verbally about the study and their role in it. Participants were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study and the importance of their contribution as stakeholders in the wholesale and retail sector. They were also informed that their participation would be entirely voluntary and would not result in any withdrawal of benefits from the SETA. Written and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The small business managers were asked to complete a consent form, which emphasised their voluntary participation and assured them that issues such as confidentiality and their anonymity would be respected. Transcripts of the interviews and all confidential material were kept in a private place of storage and remain the responsibility of the researcher. The raw data and the materials collected would also be available to the research participants and other researchers. Participants would however be assured that their confidentiality would be maintained should another researcher wish to use the raw research data.

3.7 BIAS

In qualitative research, bias refers to influences that can compromise the sampling processes, collection of data, data analysis and the reporting of the final findings (Ogden, 2008, p. 61). Janesick (2003, p. 56) argues that no research design is bias free or value free, especially when qualitative data is used. It is important for the researcher using qualitative data to identify his or her own bias, as this will help the researcher to see where the questions that guide this research are crafted. Ethical issues are regular considerations in qualitative research. Questions of how much to keep in the final report and how much to keep out of the final report are ever present (Janesick, 2003, p. 56). This was particularly true for this study as often the interviews between the participants and myself as interviewer deviated from a strictly structured interview format. It was important to present the information in the findings in a manner that best captured the social situation without compromising the research itself. In order to ensure that bias did not affect the interview and research process, I focussed only on the questions given in the interview schedule and covered only the answers that pertained to this in the findings.

Bias could also have affected the sampling selection of participants as I have worked with all of them for about six to seven years. There is a familiar and almost casual relationship that has been developed over the years. Researchers, however, manage bias such as this by being aware of their values and assumptions and by looking for data that is conflicting and, they must keep their minds open to alternative interpretations of their data (Ogden, 2008, p. 62). The researcher needs to develop a rapport with the respondents in order to gain their trusts if he or she hopes to get authentic and relevant data for the research study. My previous professional relationships with the various respondents created a good rapport between myself and them. Rapport is important in interviewing scenarios in order to build an appropriate relationship. Morgan and Guevara (2008, p.

729) argue that it is important to let the participants know the extent to which the interviewer will be the main listener. Rapport in research relationships can also be complex in that it can evoke dilemmas regarding the amount of self disclosure that it requires from the participants and how much information the researcher chooses to disclose or deem as necessary in the final report (Morgan & Guevara, 2008, p. 729). All of this could have created a bias and lack of objectivity in the study. Objectivity is not a term that is commonly used in working with qualitative data. Rather than being objective, subjectivity is acknowledged and embraced (Miller, 2008, p 573). Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 273) discuss the concept of inter-subjectivity and maintain that objectivity should be seen in two ways. In the first, the researcher is central to the research study, so would need to be unbiased in their interpretations and reporting of the data. In the second, the researcher needs to develop a relationship with the respondents in order to get the relevant data from them.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This study from an interpretivist perspective explored the small business managers' perceptions and interpretation of employees' learning through the voucher-training programme based on their personal experience of their employees' behaviours in the workplace after they (the employees) attended the voucher workshops. As case studies are often used when there is a new phenomenon about which there is not much information, it is appropriate to use this research approach when investigating the influences of the voucher-training system on employees as perceived by small business managers.

The respondents in this study had to be small business managers in the wholesale and retail sector. They were selected purposefully rather than randomly as they had to have participated in the voucher-training programme. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen respondents in order to generate the necessary data. Data analysis involved a systematic process of recording the interviews with respondents on a digital recorder and transcribing the data verbatim. The data was then organised into categories through the process of open coding. The notion of inter-subjectivity was utilised in order to address possible issues of bias in this study as no research design utilising qualitative data is bias free or value free.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The results and discussion in this chapter emanate from the research that was conducted with fourteen respondents from March to April 2013. A descriptive approach from an interpretive perspective was used to understand how the managers of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector perceived the voucher-training programme. The empirical research comprised of pre-determined semi-structured interview questions.

The respondents were asked a range of questions that covered their rationale for selecting specific training programmes, to describing the effects of the training programmes on employee behaviour. They were also asked to identify further training needs of their employees and to suggest possible improvements to the voucher-training system in order to determine whether these training programmes meet the needs of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector.

4.2 TARGET GROUP AND SAMPLE POPULATION

The target group for this study were small business managers within the wholesale and retail sector in the Western Cape. These small businesses are levy paying companies who employ between eight and forty nine people within the company. The participants in the study were either senior managers, owners, members or finance managers in the company. All respondents participated in the voucher programme which the SETA launched in 2010 and 2012.

Respondents for this study were selected purposefully rather than randomly (Struwig & Stead, 2010, p. 121). The respondents can be characterised as follows, also refer to Annexure B:

- Respondent one is the finance manager at a décor retail store which trades seven days a week. The company is based at the Waterfront in Cape Town and employed thirty nine people at the time of the study.
- Respondent two is the general manager for three retail branches that specialise in hardware and tools. All three stores are open six days a week and are based in Paarden Island, Parrow and Montague Gardens. They employed twenty one, twenty five and twenty people at the various sites (sixty six in total) at the time of the study.
- Respondent three is the finance manager of a wholesale company that trades five days a week. They are wholesalers of luggage. The company had eleven employees at the time of the study and are based in Greenpoint, Cape Town.
- Respondent four is the finance manager of a wholesale company that specialises in music and software. The company is located in Montague Gardens and trades five days a week. They employed twenty seven people at the time of the study.

- Respondent five is the finance manager of a retail hardware store that trades seven days a week. The company employed forty five people at the time of the study and are based in Platteklouf.
- Respondent six is the finance manager of two small companies that specialises in the wholesale and retail of heavy duty pumps. Because of the nature of their work, they trade five days a week. Both companies are based in Montague Gardens and employed ten and twenty six people respectively at the two sites (thirty six in total) at the time of the study.
- Respondent seven is a small business part owner and manager of a dried fruit wholesale company. They work five days a week. The company is based in Stikland and employed ten people at the time of the study.
- Respondent eight is the owner and manager of a heavy duty wood factory whose staff work five days a week. They are based in Epping Industria and employed eleven people at the time of the study.
- Respondent nine is the finance manager of three small companies' which specialises in the wholesale and retail of heavy duty pipes, pumps and other hardware. They trade six days a week. They are based in Stikland and employed a total of fifty five people (thirty two, sixteen and seven respectively at the three companies) at the time of the interview.
- Respondent ten is the finance and marketing manager of a small retail medical supplies company. They trade five days a week. This company is based in West Beach and employed nine people at the time of the study.
- Respondent eleven is a part owner/ member of a bathroom wholesale supply company and they trade five days a week. They were located in the industrial area of Beaconvale in Parrow and had fifteen employees at the time of the study.
- Respondent twelve is the finance manager of a retail chain that specialises in the sales of tobacco and games. They trade seven days a week, employed forty two people at the time of the study and are based in Edgemoed.
- Respondent thirteen is a wholesaler of cycling equipment and trades five days a week. They are located in Observatory and employed sixteen people at the time of the study.
- Respondent fourteen is a wholesaler of sports equipment and trades five days a week. They employed ten people at the time of the study and are based in Stikland.

The sample of respondents selected was chosen to reflect the varying types of businesses and trading found in the wholesale and retail sector. The sample include companies that are wholesalers or retailers and in some instances, are both wholesalers and retailers. Some trade five days a week, some six days a week and others seven days a week. The types of the products these companies manufacture or sell cover a wide spectrum of products that are produced or sold in the wholesale and retail sector. The skills needed to operate in these companies, although seemingly the same, vary from company to company because of their unique selling perspectives.

The quotations used in the results section are verbatim quotes from the respondents and indicate the background and context within which this study should be read.

4.3 RESULTS

The open coding of the interview data were grouped into themes based on the research questions (see chapter 1, section 1.3.1 and annexure A). The results will be discussed based on the interviewed managers' rationale for selecting specific training programmes, their perceptions of the effects of the training interventions on the behaviour of employees, their perceptions of the further training needs of their employees, and their insights on possible improvements to the voucher-training system.

4.3.1 Identifying the rationale of small business managers for selecting specific training programmes

Small business managers were asked to explain their reasoning for selecting specific programmes for their staff to attend during the voucher-training workshops. These reasons explain why the voucher programmes were chosen, the possible influence they had on employees and their future progression and development within their company. It also explains how the company itself benefited from the employees involvement in these programmes and lists the most appropriate programme for these small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector.

The small business managers' reasons can be clearly summed up in the following four points. The employee's lack of skills was the first reason why managers sent them on training through the voucher programme. Secondly, if the employees benefited from these programmes then inadvertently, the company benefited as well. Sending employees on programmes offered by the voucher programme system prepared them for future positions within the company, which was the third reason for taking part in the voucher-training programme. In the fourth place, the programmes offered were in general suitable to the company's line of business in the wholesale and retail sector.

Employees' lack of skills motivated managers to send them on training so they could get more skills. Respondent six (R6) felt passionately that most of her employees had completed Grade 12 and had no experience in how to speak to clients with specific reference to listening and interpreting what the clients were trying to say.

...most of these guys who only had matric and they didn't understand how to speak to a staff member or how to handle themselves in a managerial manner or how to deal with it without swearing, or you know the understanding of writing it...never had a face to face with a client. They couldn't deal with the client when the client was irate. (R6)

Secondly, managers felt that employees benefitted from programmes personally and inadvertently, the company benefitted from their new knowledge.

...to improve the nature of our business...the key to any business is obviously educating your staff to facilitate their functions properly. (R8)

...we were looking for courses that would benefit the business in terms of the skills shortages that we've identified. (R4)

...I was hopefulthat they would come back with the additional knowledge which they could use for the benefit of the company. (R2)

The third reason why certain employees were sent on specific training programmes was because, as one respondent indicated, he hoped that sending staff on these training programmes would prepare them for future positions within the company.

...we thought that this was something they could use on a day to day basis and it would also provide them with skills that they could have even before we started training them in a certain position. (R9)

In the fourth place, respondents agreed that the programmes offered were appropriate to wholesale and retail and most suited to their line of business.

...we are in the retail industry so that's perfect, it relates to what our staff, the job they do. (R12)

...it fell in line with what they do in their everyday work...it would help them broaden their skills. (R11)

...within our respective fields in our company it would be better what we did on a day to day basis so we went on customer care and we also went on financial management... (R10)

Respondent seven maintained that he looked through the courses and chose whatever he thought was appropriate for the specific individuals. Then he gave employees the option to choose the programmes they would want to go on from his shortened list. He chose the programmes which he thought would be to their advantage and to the business advantage and which would help them do their job better.

Respondents therefore had varied reasons as to why they made use of the voucher-training programmes. Besides being an opportunity that was never afforded to small businesses before and being at no cost to the company, the four main reasons cited related to programmes benefitting either the company and/or the individual employee and programmes being appropriate to the wholesale and retail business sector.

4.3.2 Describing the managers perceptions of the effects of the training interventions on the behaviour of employees

Small business managers were asked to reflect on any changes in their employees' behaviour after the employees had returned from the training interventions. The perceived influence on employees' productivity in the workplace was discussed. Their comments range from positive behaviours which they witnessed, to poor or no influence from the training interventions on employees behaviours at all. They discussed the various training workshops which employees had attended and gave their perceptions of the calibre of training offered to their employees.

Accredited providers with the Wholesale & Retail SETA offered general programmes suited to the wholesale and retail sector. Respondents sent their employees on voucher-training programmes which they found to be particularly suited to their work environment in either wholesale or retail or both. Employees attended one or more of the following training interventions; Pastel accounting, Basic book keeping, Sales, Warehouse/stock control, Customer care, Computer Excel training, Supervisory skills and Selling skills. Small business managers had hoped that in choosing these particular programmes, these programmes would influence their employees positively and invariably, their businesses as well. Their responses, however, indicate that the training workshops had – in their – view both positive and poor or little influence on the employees' behaviours in the workplace.

Whilst all respondents were appreciative of the training opportunities afforded to their employees by the SETA, eleven respondents (n=11) noted positive behaviours amongst employees after their return from the voucher workshops. These were Respondents one, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen. Positive behaviours the respondents noted included that employees were more knowledgeable when they returned from training, as is evident from the interview with Respondent fourteen:

...she didn't have to ask as many questions because prior to that, she would sit and go I'm not sure how this works and now all of a sudden she was in a position to get on with her work because she understood more about Pastel than she did before.

Respondent eleven stated that employees became more involved in the work they were doing and became more productive.

...they felt like they were, that we took interest in them and we were helping them to better their skills.

Staff felt involved in the small business and communications between management and staff improved. Staff also became productive and motivated and started to implemented new things:

...she came back quite enthusiastic and implemented a few things and she understood more when she came back. Why she was doing certain things the way it was being done and all of that...The one thing that stood out, apparently they looked

at the Consumer Act with that training, so, and most of them weren't aware of the Consumer act and what it or all of that. So that was something positive (R12)

...now they understand why I would ask questions and (say) don't shout at the client, when you pick up the phone, if your face is frowning it comes through in your voice (R6)

Managers noted that staff in general were positive, enthusiastic and productive after attending the training workshops:

...the one young man, he only started working in the year that he had training ...and he came back all excited and fired up and just ready to go and we could see a difference in his attitude and his positive thing...(R9)

Respondent six used the training manuals staff brought back from the training sessions to help the staff on the sales floor:

...I could take the manual ...I would say in your manual they address this specific situation, and then you say how you understand the situation because the situation came up now and you are dealing differently from what they trained you.

Managers noted that the company image improved when employees answered the phones and spoke with confidence (R11, 6 & 9). When deliveries were made, employees were not afraid to talk to the clients (R11). There were also employees who attended training courses because of self-fulfilment as the following response indicates:

The computer course, this gentlemen, his role didn't involve computers, so that would have been personal fulfilment for him because he was a sales person and he was interested in computers and learning more about them so it didn't affect his position. (R1)

These positive behaviours observed by small business managers indicate the potential positive influence the voucher programmes could have had on employees. They perceived that employees came back positive, enthusiastic and productive after attending the voucher workshops. The small business managers themselves were able to use the learning material given to employees during the training sessions to train employees, even after the training was over. The company image improved because they now had better trained employees who were able to present themselves to clients with confidence and decorum. Further, communication between the managers and employees improved and employees were overall productive in the workplace.

Some business managers also perceived that the behaviour of their employees after they had returned from the voucher-training workshops showed that the training had little or no influence at all on the employees in that they already had supplementary knowledge and the training offered employees no new learning. Three respondents felt strongly that they had observed no positive

influence of the training on employees in the workplace. These were respondents two, three and ten.

Respondent seven noted that whilst his employees had a much higher level of enthusiasm for a couple of months after the training, this seems to

...wane once everyone gets back into the routine of life again...

He felt strongly that training needs to be on going:

...when you're doing the same old thing day in and day out and you are not actually stimulating your mind to think out of the box, or do anything different... In a perfect scenario I would think that staff need to go at least every year on something just to refresh everything... (R7)

Respondents two, three, eight and ten noted that their employees already had supplementary knowledge and were already familiar with the contents of the learning material. They were very experienced and had been in retail for a while.

X [Respondent's name] had always run his warehouse sufficiently; I think his attending the course maybe a way of supplementing his knowledge, the same would go for the sales staff. (R3)

Y [Respondent's name] already knows her way around Pastel...and Z [Respondents name], from a customer view point (R8)

Respondent two noted that he saw no marked increase in productivity or enthusiasm.

The greatest part of the feedback I got was negative.

Small business managers noted that employees did not want to go for training sessions on their off days, they wanted to go on their work days. Managers on the other hand did not want to give employees days off to attend training. They argued that this affected their front line and staff schedules. Respondent seven argued that the smaller the company, the more you rely on your staff, so to have staff members out of the workplace for a couple of days always affects the business.

...if you're a huge company and you're employing 100s of people and you take two or three once a month it's not a big issue. But if we take three people away from us then it does create a problem (R7).

Respondent ten felt that there was no influence on her business after her staff went on training.

...I found that the programmes were not practical enough to have a major impact on our day to day running of the business, being that wholesale and retail is a very broad spectrum...

Wholesale and retail comprises of a broad spectrum of companies (including companies selling furniture, clothing, hardware, jewellery and watches, sports goods, shoes, fresh fruit and vegetables to name but a few). Respondent seven perceived that while employees were enthusiastic when they first went to the training, their enthusiasm waned after a couple of months and suggested ongoing training every year. Respondents two, three, ten and eight maintained that there was no perceived influence on their employees' behaviour after the training because the employees already had supplementary knowledge and had learnt nothing new at the training workshops. Further complications such as employees not wanting to attend training sessions on their days off and the managers' reluctance to send employees on training interventions also impacted negatively on the voucher-training programme as managers were not able to perceive any positive behaviours from their employees when they returned from their training.

Small business managers noted various concerns about the training sessions their employees had attended. Their concerns ranged from the quality of the training intervention, to the frustrations they noted their employees had expressed due to the different learning levels of people in the class. The lack of general skills in sales techniques also caused frustrations for their employees as the training focused on the selling of clothes and all of the respondents (n=14) in this research study worked with hardware, food or other products. Eight small business managers (Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12 & 13) complained that the quality of training programmes were not suitable for their employees in that there is a broad spectrum in wholesale and retail and much of all the training was done from the retailing of clothing perspective.

Respondent two traded in retail from an industrial and hardware perspective and wanted sales to be taught from a more focussed product knowledge perspective.

...most guys that came back said that they didn't feel that they could really apply what they had been taught as it related to clothing retail and ours is very much an industrial retail environment.

Respondent ten argued that sales programmes should also focus on selling to customers on email and telephonically. The courses focused heavily on face-to-face retail selling.

...we don't have a face, customers don't come to see us, so all the retail training didn't really help us.

Respondents ten and five noted that their employees expressed frustrations at the training sessions as there were different levels of learners in class – no vetting or pre-screening was done. The full benefit of course could not be appreciated because it was too rushed and they were pushed for time.

The spectrum in wholesale and retail is wide and one of the concerns the small business managers perceived was that the voucher-training sessions their employees attended was taught from the retailing of the clothing perspective. They also expressed concern at the frustration their

employees had to experience because learners on the programmes were not vetted before attending class. Consequently, many learners were not suited to the programmes they had attended. This affected the quality of the training provided as these learners battled to keep up with the rest of the class.

4.3.3 Identifying manager's perceptions of further training needs for their employees

The managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programme are essential in order to develop insights into the possible improvements and sustainability of the programme. These small business managers ultimately decide who should attend the voucher-training programmes. They also decide whether these programmes are suitable for their employees as they are already familiar with their employees' and the business needs. Their perceptions of the further training needs of their employees are therefore essential to this study.

All fourteen respondents identified various programmes they deemed suitable for their staff in the wholesale and retail sector. These are programmes the small business managers would like the SETA to offer in order to develop the further training needs of their staff. The programmes to be considered are:

- telephone etiquette;
- stock management;
- team performance / team building;
- sales from a retail and cold calling perspective;
- advanced sales;
- basic sales dealing with the psychological communication with customers;
- customer care;
- communication skills including writing skills;
- business language – verbal and written;
- diversity programmes;
- internal audit – basic audit knowledge, knowing why things are required;
- promotional marketing – moving to a technological era (such as face booking/ blogging / email);
- advanced computers – for employees who already know the basics;
- basic computers (introduction to Microsoft office);
- creditors and debtors programmes;
- human resource management;
- financial management/ arithmetic/ basic understanding of maths – foundational principles (required for all levels of staff);
- supervisor training;

- product knowledge in areas such as Motor industry programmes and paint, irrigation, electricians, plumbing, building estimation, cement, stones;
- life skills such as emotional intelligence, motivation and first aid; and
- training that is part of legislation (such as health and safety, food regulations, hygiene, working with chemicals).

Respondent seven felt strongly that life skills and motivation programmes were needed for his employees.

...their exposure to things in life is limited, so my personal opinion is that they do live in a very small world and come from a disadvantaged background. They packing fruit in a packet is what they do all day and then they go home to their life, there isn't, they are not exposed to anything that stimulates them mentally wise...I think they feel like they only are good enough to put a product in a packet.

Because of the nature of the business, and because they are so small, these businesses find it easier to train employees internally than pay to send them off site. It must also be noted that many small businesses do on the job training.

The learning programmes small business managers have perceived to be essential in furthering the development of their employees are programmes that suits the respondents in this study. These insights are important in order to understand the type of programmes needed by small business managers in determining the further training needs for their employees in the wholesale and retail sector.

4.3.4 Developing insights about possible improvements to the voucher-training system

Respondents were asked to give their insights about how they would improve on the voucher-training system that had been offered to small businesses by the W&R SETA. They understood why they selected certain programmes for their employees to attend. They described the perceived effects of these training interventions on the behaviour of their employees. They were also able to identify further training needs for their employees. They were then asked to give their insights on possible improvements to the voucher-training system. The respondents shared various insights, from their personal experience after they had sent employees on the learning programmes, on how they felt the voucher-training system could be improved. These insights can be identified in the following three themes of communicating with stakeholders about the programme, administration of the voucher programme and the structuring of the programme.

The theme of communicating with stakeholders about the programme indicated that all fourteen respondents (n=14) preferred if all their communication from the SETA came to them from their Skills Development Facilitator. They stated that they received spam and only read emails from their Skills Development Facilitator. They further stated that if they were confused about any matters, they would contact her directly as she is readily available to them.

It's always nice to get emails and keep up to date, but then it's always nice to speak to a consultant more to explain why and how and all of that (R14)

The theme of the administration of the voucher programme showed that the respondents were grateful that the voucher application system was simple to use. All respondents (n=14) stated that the system used to complete the applications for the voucher-training was very basic and quick to use. Small businesses have limited time to focus on administrative matters as they have to focus on the operations of the business itself. Respondent five stated that the administration of handling the matters of an employee who was unable to attend class due to a death in the family was resolved when the training provider allowed the employee to attend a class on a more suitable date. The respondents (n=14) stated that they asked their Skills Development Facilitator to manage the administration of their applications and depended on her for guidance. Respondent eleven noted that it was in general a friendly system that was quick, simple and easy to use.

The theme of the structuring of the voucher programme focussed on aspects of programme delivery which respondents hoped would improve the implementation of similar programmes. The categories found within this theme focussed on feedback from the respondents on general improvements to the structure and delivery of the voucher programme to the scheduling of the programmes as preferred by the respondents given the varying trading periods in the wholesale and retail sector throughout the year. The final category focussed on the respondents suggestions about how to manage the nonattendance of employees who initially agreed to attend a learning programme but fail to actually attend causing unnecessary costs to both the SETA and the provider.

The small business managers had already put their employees through the voucher programmes and had experienced the impact of the training on their employees. Their suggestions on how they would like to see the voucher system improved were essential to understanding the successes and gaps in the implementation of the programme.

In the first category the respondents gave general feedback on programme delivery. They maintained that the calibre of the trainer was not always up to standard. At times the trainer would not focus on the subject and deviated from the topic (R1). Respondent five found the programmes to be rushed. Respondent fourteen, eleven and three expressed a need for a wider range of programmes and suggested that more advanced programmes are required to suit the varying levels of employees who attend. They also suggested that employees be screened by the provider before they attend a class to ensure that they are suited to the programme. Respondent fourteen suggested that the provider put employees through a vetting process. This would ensure that learners are not sitting in a class learning content that may be too difficult.

I think the only thing I picked up which Z [Respondent's name] mentioned was that there was people that did not go on the intermediate course and they didn't know that they should've been doing the basic and it meant that was a lot of questions on

the day. Which kind of put her in a position where she was wanting to learn and they were asking things that were more on a basic level...do a vetting process probably beforehand and make sure that the people that are going to the course that they've actually done the basic course before they move on to the next one (R14)

Respondents ten, six and seven requested that the SETA and provider supply employees with basic logistics on the training programme such as where to park, venue details and the names of programme and trainer. Training was held at the College of Cape Town in the Cape Town city centre. Many of the companies (n=11) were not based in the Cape Town city centre so had no idea where the training venue was. Managers stated that their employees expressed unhappiness at the lack of detail given to them and requested that details on parking, the venue and the trainers name be sent to them in the future. Respondent seven expressed frustration because he had only found out later that some of his employees had gone to the wrong class. He requested that training be offered by the SETA on a regular basis as ongoing training boosts confidence.

In the second category respondents discussed the scheduling of the training programmes and the importance of ensuring that each programme is not too long, held on the correct days during the week and presented during the less busy periods in the wholesale and retail sector. Correct scheduling of training workshops will ensure that managers of small businesses do send their employees on training programmes. The length of the training programmes offered to wholesale and retail employees would determine how much time an employee is off from the workplace. Allowing employees to take time off to attend training is always a sensitive issue with small business managers, as they do not have additional employees who can stand in for the employees who go on training. These are small business with a small work force, hence the length of any training programme aimed at a small business needs to be carefully evaluated. Small business manager's responses to how long they would prefer a training programme to be varied from one or two or three days. Respondent thirteen suggested that if longer sessions are required, then classes should be held over eight weeks.

The next aspect to consider when scheduling a training intervention in the small business sector is to consider which day or days the training intervention should be held. Respondents discussed on which days they would prefer to have their employees attend any training programmes. In the wholesale and retail sector, businesses trade seven days a week. Some businesses trade six or five days a week depending on the nature and location of the business. The sample of the respondents chosen for this research project trade on either five, six or seven days a week. Their feedback on which days they would prefer to send staff on training varied. Respondents one, two, three, eight, nine and fourteen preferred training to take place on Saturdays or a part thereof. Respondents six and seven preferred Wednesdays but not weekends. After hours training was also an option but they preferred a week day, so they had more control over the attendance. These companies also do not open on a Saturday so find it unfair to ask staff to attend training sessions

on their day off – hence, this must be done during work time. But this clashes with work schedules. Transport for staff was also a problem on a Saturday afternoon.

... for a small company like ours to not have those people here on those days because it creates an issue because there aren't extra hands to pick up their work...the Saturday courses do not work either because that's the only day that they actually have to do their shopping to do their banking, to do whatever else they need
(R7)

The rest of the respondents (n=6) had no particular preference when it came to the days they would prefer for employee training.

The final aspect to consider when scheduling a training programme is to ensure that training programmes are held in the quiet times of the year. The timing of business programmes on offer during the year was discussed by the respondents. This is important as businesses in the wholesale and retail sector are very busy over the festive periods and do not send employees on training. Understanding which months are suitable for training sessions to be held will ensure that managers of small businesses do send their employees on training interventions. All fourteen respondents stated that winter was the best time in the wholesale and retail sector to let staff attend training. Beyond that, thirteen respondents (n=13) preferred if programmes were offered from the second half of the year to October. Only Respondent five did not mind if training was held in winter and in the first half of the year, around February to May.

In the third category respondents shared their views on who would take responsibility if employees did not attend the training sessions after saying that they would. Responses were divided amongst respondents showing concern and counselling employees should there be a problem and others who saw the use of threats as a means of compliance. Respondents gave hypothetical guesses as to how they would handle the situation.

... if the person just dropped out of the course we have counselling, in other words, we want to know what happened, why, the employee wanted to do this and now suddenly... (R5)

Respondents two and twelve were concerned and offered to incentivise employees for going on training. Training was also seen as a reward for doing good work. Respondents two and twelve told staff that training is necessary for performance appraisals.

... tying in what people do in terms of upgrading their own skills to performance appraisals, tying that to salary increases so that rather than hold a whip over them of disciplinary action, offering the incentive that if one completes the course that that would go towards getting better increases...(R2)

Respondent five offered counselling to staff if they did not attend a training session. Many companies work on trusts and give staff the option to do or not do the training.

I approach the staff and say do you want to do it and if somebody was not going to give 100% commitment to doing it I wouldn't send them in their first place (R14)

These were some of the positive arguments used to motivate staff to attend training sessions.

Respondent four suggested that the employee pay 50% of the training costs and the company pay the other 50%. Respondent six suggested that employees sign a training contract stating that the employee will work in the company for a certain period of time as the company was paying for the training. Respondent nine stated that if staff do not attend the training session then the full amount should be deducted from the employee's salary. Respondent ten suggested that staff pay a refundable registration fee which is returned to the learner when the project is over. Respondent nine said that she would not ever send staff on training if they prove to be difficult. The remainder of the respondents said that staff would have to be penalised in some way.

...if you don't actually attend then you are going to be liable for the costs of that (R7)

...if they don't go and the cost is R2500 they need to pay for it (R10)

Respondents' insights on who would take responsibility for employees who did not attend a training session after saying they would, varied. Some respondents indicated they would show concern and provide counselling to employees, whilst others would use threats and deductions from salaries as a means of ensuring that employees attended training sessions. These insights were, however, varied and were based on hypothetical scenarios given by the respondents as all but one (R5) had actually experienced an employee not attending a training session.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The perceptions of small business managers hold the key to determining the effectiveness of the voucher-training programme of employees. The results and discussions show that their perceptions are varied, yet similar in many ways. The reasons small business managers gave explaining why they selected specific programmes for employees indicate the influence the training had on employees and their future progression and development within their company. It showed how the company itself benefited from the employees involvement in these programmes and lists the most appropriate programme for these small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector. The small business managers' reflections on any changes in their employees' behaviour after the employee attended the voucher-training programme ranged from positive behaviours which they noticed to poor or no influence from the training interventions on employee behaviours at all. The learning programmes small business managers noted as essential in furthering the development of their employees are programmes that suit the respondents in this study. These insights are important in order to understand the type of programmes needed by small business managers in determining the further training needs for their employees in the wholesale and retail sector. The respondents shared various insights, from their personal experience after they had sent employees

on the learning programmes, on how they felt the voucher programme system could be improved. The insights these small business managers provide on how to possibly improve the voucher-training programme indicate a thorough knowledge of their business and operational requirements which the SETA and providers need to pay careful attention to should this programme continue.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn up in this chapter emanate from the interviews conducted with fourteen small business managers in the wholesale and retail sector. Small businesses, according to the National Small Business Act 102 of 1996, are business entities that employ less than fifty people (1996, p. 2). The sample for this study comprised of fourteen partners or managers of small businesses who are registered stakeholders in the W&R sector and based in the Western Cape and, who had accessed the voucher-training programme at least once since 2010. The data from the interviews with the small business managers was analysed and the findings recorded in chapter 4. The aim of this study is to investigate perceptions of small business managers of the voucher-training programme offered by the W&R SETA in order to develop insights into the possible improvements of the voucher-training programme.

The respondents were asked a range of questions that covered their rationale for selecting specific training programmes, to describing the effects of the training programmes on employee behaviour. They were also asked to identify further training needs of their employees and to suggest possible improvements to the voucher-training system in order to determine whether these training programmes meet the needs of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector. The feedback given by respondents answers the research question of how do the managers of small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector perceive the voucher-training programme.

5.1.1 Small business managers' rationale for programme selection (Objective 1)

Evidence indicates that small business managers sent employees on specific learning programmes because employees lacked skills and they had hoped that sending employees on training programmes might fill this skills gap in the workplace. In chapter 2, section 2.2, Bamber and O' Shea (2009, p. 337) maintained that work activities required employees to interact with other employees and customers. These work activities demand that their employees learning becomes a social and an interactive experience where knowledge is not just received but is seen through reflection as these employees are engaged with real problems within their work context. This holistic experience can be seen when respondent six had employees who had matric certificates but no experience of how to speak and listen to clients. Employees would swear and had no idea of how to handle themselves in a managerial manner. Attending the voucher programme workshop on communication helped the small business manager fill this gap, as employees were then able to deal with customers face to face. WPL is generally focussed on learning associated with work activities that are both formal and informal in nature. Managers ensure that employees take on industry related training, courses and programmes. These training

initiatives are useful to managers and results in workers learning new skills and knowledge. In chapter 2, section 2.2, Spencer (2009, p. 296) argues that some of the learning programmes can also be criticised for being narrowly manager focussed because they are more concerned with tying employees to a particular manager than with giving employees holistic, generic and portable skills. Respondent seven, in chapter 4, section 4.3.1, maintained that he looked through the courses and chose whatever he thought was appropriate for the specific individuals. Then he gave employees the option to choose the programmes they would want to go on from his shortened list. He chose the programmes which he thought would be to their advantage and to the business advantage and which would help them do their job better. Svensen (2007, p. 815) on the other hand states that one of the factors that strengthen SMEs is the role of managers in the day-to-day running of the small business and their hands on approach to workplace learning. This is essential for the planning and organising phases of learning and helps to even the power imbalance in the relationship between informal WPL and the formal learning system. Whilst the small business managers hands on approach to the voucher programme is evident because of their direct involvement in deciding which programmes employees should attend, Svensen (2007, p. 815) argues that their role in training may have a negative influence in that they may not see it as a priority. Their view is that learning is often seen as a service to be delivered within which the manager does not need to get involved. Another imbalance is seen in the programme development of learning initiatives. Developing a learning programme is seen as the responsibility of the provider. Joint development of the intended learning programme by managers however, may facilitate learning at all levels of the organisation (Svensen, 2007, p. 815). The fourteen respondents who participated in the voucher programme were directly involved in their employees learning. The developing of the learning programme was, as Svensen (2007, p. 815) maintained, left in the hands of the provider.

In chapter 2, section 2.3, Svensen (2007, p. 814) states that SMEs are uninterested in formal learning and prefer the flexibility of WPL. They prefer the flexibility of using consultants and informal learning strategies to acquire new knowledge, as sending employees on formal training programmes is seen as too expensive. While Fenwick (2010, p. 151) argues that learning should be embedded in everyday practises, the Voucher-training System itself allowed small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector to access free short formal courses that provide skills with immediate effect on the small businesses. These skills were also within the priority skill areas of Computer Literacy, Financial Management, Merchandising, Sales Skills, HIV/AIDS Training, Time Management, Customer Care, Small Business Management and Negotiation Skills (W&R SETA, 2010/2011, p. 5). Providers accredited with the W&R SETA were allowed to offer training programmes that suit the education and training needs of the sector. The small business managers paid the provider with the free vouchers they were allocated by the SETA. The perceptions and insights of the small business managers, into how effective they deem the voucher programmes to be on their employees, stem from their observations of their employees after they had returned

from their formal training interventions. Their perceptions and insights are imperative as they see the everyday work practises of their employees.

Grosjean (2007, p. 300) states that although theoretical knowledge gained from an academic environment is important, the need for a knowledge-in-practise type of learning is essential. He refers to theoretical learning gained from academic institutions as Mode 1 learning and knowledge gained in a practical environment as Mode 2 learning. The theoretical learning gained at formal academic institutions is not, however, limited to Mode 1 learning, as there is a move toward Mode 2 learning as well. Mode 2 learning is seen as a context-driven, holistic form of knowledge and relates to learning outside formal institutions. This enhances Fenwick's (2010, p. 151) argument that learning should be embedded in everyday practises. Mode 2 learning engages personality, intellectual and craft skills (Rochford, 2007, p. 708). This type of learning is not just about learning in the workplace but about taking it further into a lifelong learning experience (Jonsson, 2007, p. 480). The training offered by the voucher intervention was theoretical learning gained from academic institutions and can be referred to as Mode 1 learning (Grosjean, 2007, p. 300). The findings reveal that small business managers prefer the knowledge-in-practise type of learning as in chapter 4, section 4.3.2, they note various concerns about the training sessions their employees had attended. Their concerns ranged from the quality of the training intervention, to the frustrations they noted their employees had expressed due to the different learning levels of people in the class. The lack of general skills in sales techniques also caused frustrations for their employees as the training focused on the selling of clothes and all of the respondents (N=14) in this research study worked with hardware, food or other products. Eight small business managers (Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12 & 13) complained that the quality of training programmes were not suitable for their employees in that there is a broad spectrum in wholesale and retail and much of all the training was done from the retailing of clothing perspective. The need for a knowledge-in-practise type of learning is essential and could contextualised the employees learning and alleviate some of the frustrations experienced by the small business managers.

Spencer (2009, p. 296) maintained that often what employees learn may have little to do with their work itself, as one cannot assume that all their learning at work is related just to the work. Employees in a workplace need to feel that their knowledge counts and is regarded as valuable. If their memories, experiences and everyday knowledge are regarded as irrelevant, if their identities are ignored, then we live in an inhuman society (Harnsten & Rosen, 2009, p. 231) and employees are not motivated to work.

Respondents (R8, R4 & R2) felt that when their employees benefit from the programmes personally, this invariably benefits the company because employees are then motivated. According to The Centre for Workplace Skills (2011, p. 9), in chapter 2, section 2.6, employees are motivated to work in teams, thereby encouraging commitment to learning and peer support. Respondent nine, in chapter 4, section 4.3.1, hoped that sending employees on training would prepare them for

future jobs within the company (R9). Employees become more confident, are team players, produce quality work and enjoy their jobs (The Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, The Centre for Workplace Skills (2011, p. 9) argue that companies that invest in training or workplace learning have a lower turnover rate than those who spend less on training or workplace learning. Respondents twelve, eleven and ten in chapter 4, section 4.3.1 sent employees on the programmes because the programmes suited their line of business in the wholesale and retail sector (R12). They argued that the programmes they chose fell in line with what they do in their everyday work and would help employees broaden their skills. Workplace learning may help businesses to become more profitable and competitive, the quality of work may improve and there is an overall improvement in workplace culture and morale.

5.1.2 Small business managers' perceptions of the effects of the training interventions on the behaviour of employees (Objectives 2)

Small business managers' perceptions of the effects of the training interventions on the behaviour of employees indicate both positive behaviours and behaviours that indicate no or few positive influences. They also gave their perceptions of the scheduling of training interventions in the wholesale and retail sector.

5.1.2.1 Positive behaviours

Whilst all respondents appreciated the training opportunities afforded to them by the SETA, most (n=11) noted positive behaviours from their employees after they had returned from the voucher-training workshops. Some of the positive behaviours noted by the small business managers were that employees seemed more knowledgeable when they returned from training (R14), employees also became more involved in the work they were doing and became more productive (R11) and, communication between the managers and the employees improved (R12 & R6). Bamber and O'Shea (2009, p. 337) maintain that with WPL, work activities require learners to interact with fellow staff, customers and tools and may furthermore encourage learners to think in ways that are appropriate to the business. Perceptions of the small business managers indicate that training became a holistic experience for employees because they were encouraged to think in ways that were appropriate to the business and interact with staff and customers. In chapter 2, section 2.5, The Centre for Workplace Skills, (2011, p. 16) found that due to the costs of workplace learning programmes, which can be significant for smaller business with limited finances, the small business managers get themselves certified through external training then go back to the workplace to train staff. Respondent six used the training manuals employees brought back as a guide to reinforce learning on the shop floor. Using these manuals to help employees on the shop floor shows how WPL allows employees to develop and improve their people relations and understand how their particular job influences the workplace and the global world (Spencer, 2007, p. 796). This is in line with Von Kotze (2009, p. 28) argument that education, learning and work relationships must be more than mere processes and must stand within a framework of practical

living. Learning done at work can provide a richer experience for both the employee and the organisation (Bibby, 2007, p. 67). Respondents also noted that the company image improved because they now had better trained employees who were able to present themselves to clients with confidence and decorum (R11, 6 & 9).

In chapter 4, section 4.3.2, respondent one discussed the attitude of the employee who attended a training programme because he was simply interested in trying something different. Respondent one referred to this as 'personal fulfilment'. Grosjean (2007, p. 300) describes this type of learning as Mode 3 learning – which is derived from the learners' own initiative. Field and Malcolm (2009, p. 172) discuss the concept of emotional labour and its implications for workplace and adult learning. They argue that skilled emotion workers are aware of their ability to manage their emotions in the workplace and see it as part of their professionalism, which in turn promotes a high standard of performance from them. Field and Malcolm (2009, p. 179) maintain that being good at managing one's emotions becomes an important part of who people believe themselves to be and provides a basis for their self-reflection of their professionalism and self-respect. This in turn affects workers views and performance in the workplace which helps them handle change and learning across their lives. Although none of the fourteen respondents directly discussed how self-reflection and self-respect featured in their employees behaviours after they returned from the training interventions, three respondents (R11, 6 & 9) noted that the company image improved when employees answered the phone and spoke with confidence. They also noted that employees were not afraid to talk to clients when they made their deliveries. This indirectly reflects employees' professionalism and emotional competence in the workplace. These positive behaviours perceived by the small business managers (n=11) indicate a general happiness and satisfaction with the voucher programme.

5.1.2.2 No or little positive influences

Three respondents however felt that they had observed no or little positive influences of the training on employees in the workplace (R2, 3 & 10). Employees who attended the training were motivated initially but the enthusiasm waned after a few months (R7). This necessitates a need for training to be on going if employees are to be constantly motivated. Respondents also noted various concerns about the quality, of the training sessions their employees had attended. At times the trainer would not focus on the subject and deviated from the topic (R1). Respondent five found the programmes to be rushed. The trainers' lack of focus and rush to complete the programme impeded employees learning.

Respondents (n=8) found that the content of the learning programme was not suitable to their business. The content taught took a one-dimensional view of retail and did not consider the broader spectrum. A subject such as sales should focus on all aspects of sales in the wholesale and retail sector and not just clothing. Respondent two complained that the programme was not suitable for his staff as his company sold hardware products and there was no link to this in the

training. Sales also involved selling over the telephone and should not only focus on sales on the shop floor (R10). Hence, respondents maintained that their employees found no benefit in the learning as the content was not appropriate to them. In chapter 2, section 2.2, Breier (2009, p. 191) argues that in WPL, recognition is given to the practical wisdom of workers by acknowledging that such knowledge exists. Respect is given to workers who have not had the opportunities or any of the advantages of formal education but have managed to survive in a way that few of the formally educated would have been able to. Respondents two, three, eight and ten in chapter 4, section 4.3.2, noted that their employees already had supplementary knowledge and were already familiar with the contents of the learning material. They were very experienced in retail and consequently gained no new knowledge from the training session.

The learning programmes themselves were too broad and needed to be placed into beginners, intermediate and advanced levels. Respondents fourteen, eleven and three suggested that employees are vetted by the provider to determine their suitability to the learning programme. The suggestion that employees are put through a vetting process before they attend a programme would alleviate the frustrations experienced by employees when they found that they were already familiar with the programme content and when other learners asked questions they were already familiar with.

5.1.2.3 Scheduling of programmes for small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector

Mokgata (2009, p. 4) maintains that the training of employees within small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector is not adequate, despite the various methods of training funded by the W&R SETA. Mokgata suggests that factors such as a small workforce in these businesses, lack of training funds within the company and training periods that do not match the small business off-peaks make it difficult for training to occur. It was therefore important to look at ways in which to facilitate education and training in small businesses.

Scheduling days for training was problematic as employees did not want to attend any training sessions on their days off whilst small business managers on the other hand were reluctant to allow employees time off to attend training sessions because this affected their staff schedules. Small businesses employ a small group of employees and if they are away from the workplace, this affects the operations of the business (R7). Because these were small businesses, managers had no additional funds to employ new staff whilst their current staff were away on training. The timing of the learning programmes thus needs to be carefully considered if small businesses managers are to send their staff on any training intervention. The Centre for Workplace Skills (2011, p. 7) lists regulatory changes from government, the lack of skilled workers, the skills gap between what workers need and what they have, increasing diversity in the workplace as challenges that SMEs face in Canada. These, and scheduling days for training, are also challenges that face SMEs in South Africa.

In the wholesale and retail sector the length of the training programme needs to be considered as managers cannot have employees away from the workplace for too long a period. The small business manager's (n=14) responses to how long they would prefer a training programme to be varied from one or two or three days. If longer sessions are required, then classes could be held over eight weeks (R13). The days on which training sessions are held also makes a difference to small business managers as in the wholesale and retail sector businesses usually trade seven days a week. Respondents in the study traded five, six or seven days a week. Their feedback on which days they would prefer to send staff on training varied. Respondents one, two, three, eight, nine and fourteen preferred training to take place on Saturdays or a part thereof. Respondents six and seven preferred Wednesdays but not weekends as they wanted to monitor the employees' attendance. They also felt it unfair to ask employees to attend training classes on their only day off and found transport for their employees to be a problem on a Saturday afternoon. The wholesale and retail sector is at their busiest over the festive periods and during school holidays. It is therefore important to not schedule any training sessions during these periods as employees would not be able to attend. All respondents (n=14) in the research study preferred training to occur in the winter months as this was their least busy trading period. One respondent (R5) did not mind if training was held in winter and also in the first half of the year.

The scheduling of training programmes for small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector needs to consider not just the length of the programme – as learners cannot be away from the workplace for too long a time, but the days and months of the year as well. The festive periods and school holidays are busy months and many businesses trade seven, six or five days a week depending on the nature of the business. These factors should be considered when drawing up a schedule for training. WPL should thus move away from Mode 1 learning and move toward a more interactive and practical form of instruction, so the significance of emotion work and emotional labour increases (Field & Malcolm, 2009, p. 179). If the focus of WPL were more interactive and practical, then small business managers would not experience the problems of when they can send employees on formal training interventions.

5.1.3 Small business managers' perceptions of further training needs for employees (Objective 3)

Respondents (n=14) identified various programmes they deemed suitable for their staff in the wholesale and retail sector. The various programmes the small business managers identified are suited to the wholesale and retail sector and are programmes they would like would like the SETA to offer in order to develop the further training needs of their staff. The programmes are also similar to the programmes that were offered on the voucher-training system. As indicated in Objectives one and two, most of the respondents were satisfied with the programme selection (n=11) and received more positive feedback on the training than negative feedback from their employees.

Respondents did however emphasize that the training programmes needed to clearly indicate if it was at beginners, intermediate or advanced level.

In chapter 2, section 2.2, Collin (2007, p. 152) maintains that managers are motivated to take the employees' wellbeing into account so as to assist them to build a satisfying balance between work and other areas of life and to become more productive in the work force. Managers recognise that WPL addresses organisational issues, which brings value to both the employee and the organisation, as it would take place at work, reduce the time employees would need to take time off to attend training and deliver individual learning. To grow, an organisation must build its strength internally, especially with the employees. An organisation cannot build its strength outside if it cannot build strength at home (Bhattacharjee, 2009, p. 152). Sawchuk and Kempf (2009, p. 154) argue that work and learning relationships are strongly shaped by cultural, political and economic histories. Respondent seven made a strong case for the need of programmes that motivate and stimulate the minds of lower level workers. He argued that workplace learning needed to be seen in the context of personal lives as in his opinion, he felt that his employees felt that they were only good enough to packet dried fruit into packets. WPL here needs to be understood from a socio-political perspective and should be seen within the context of a person's whole life. Working and learning at work should be seen in conjunction with the person's whole life, which encompasses their family, community, and social lives where learning also takes place (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 395). The guest worker programmes as given by Breier (2009, p. 182) in chapter 2, section 2.2, describes how the experiences of guest workers influences employers, government agencies, hosts and origin communities, organisers and the workers themselves. The guest worker programmes teaches not just skills and knowledge necessary for the work, but also shows how the experiences of guest workers shape their learning and development in their hosts countries. The concept of this programme is applicable in that the small business managers – in this case respondent seven, made a strong case for the need of programmes that motivate and stimulate the minds of his employees who were lower level workers. These workers come from a disadvantaged background and like the guest workers shaped the development of learning in their host countries, so too did the employees in this small business – they influenced their work environment and their managers to such an extent that the manager presented a case in which he motivated for life skills and motivation learning programmes.

5.1.4 Possible improvements to the voucher programme (Objective 4)

From a socio-political perspective, Von Kotze (2009, p. 17) notes how the role of the state in education and training interventions in general has decreased. One of the reasons she provides is the increasing changes in learning and the impossibility of designing a curriculum that is suitable for all learners who come from radically different backgrounds (2009, p. 17). Makgata (2009, p. 4), a representative of the state, maintains that the training of employees within small businesses in the wholesale and retail sector is not adequate, despite the various methods of training funded by

the W&R SETA. He however suggests that factors such as a small workforce in these businesses, lack of training funds within the company and training periods that do not match the small business off-peaks make it difficult for training to occur. It is therefore important to look at ways in which to facilitate education and training in small businesses. Von Kotze (2009, p.28) argues that education, learning and work relationships must be more than mere processes and must stand within a framework of practical living. This sentiment is echoed by respondent ten in chapter 4, section 4.3.2 who felt that there was no influence on her business after her staff went on training because the programmes were not practical enough to have a major impact on the running of her business. From a socio political perspective, Von Kotze (2009, p. 19) argues that people are unemployed because they lack skills, self-esteem and self-confidence. In order to improve their positions within the economy she suggests linking them to new networks in which they can learn about new technologies and new markets. The voucher programme on the one hand teaches employees about new technologies, depending on the training programme employees attend, but ultimately, it does not cover aspects such as networks that can influence socio political change. The scope of the Small Business Voucher-training System was only to offer short courses that provide skills with immediate effect on the small businesses, and within the priority skill areas of Computer Literacy, Financial Management, Merchandising, Sales Skills, HIV/AIDS Training, Time Management, Customer Care, Small Business Management and Negotiation Skills.

One of the objectives of the voucher-training system was to establish, develop and continue to improve communication channels between the W&R SETA and the SMEs in the sector by offering flexibility of WPL (Mokgata, 2009, p. 2). This can be seen in the feedback all respondents (n=14) gave regarding the communication between stakeholders and the SETA – they all preferred if their communication from the SETA came to them from their Skills Development Facilitator, who was appointed by the SETA. They stated that they received spam and only read emails from their Skills Development Facilitator. They further stated that if they were confused about any matters, they would contact her directly as she is readily available to them. The administration of the voucher programme showed that the respondents were grateful that the voucher application system was simple to use. All respondents (n=14) stated that the system used to complete the applications for the voucher-training was very basic and quick to use. Small businesses have limited time to focus on administrative matters, as they have to focus on the operations of the business itself. Tlhomola, Rankhumise and Van Niekerk (2010, p. 5) argue that most entrepreneurs are not aware of the support government is offering (p. 24). This positive feedback on the role of the state in training interventions indicate that for this programme, the state had succeeded in improving communications between stakeholders and the SETA. These insights were a positive reflection of the voucher programme implementation and respondents preferred if they did not change.

Some respondents (R10, 6, 7) however were not satisfied with the communication they received from the provider regarding the basic logistics of the training programmes. Training was held at

the College of Cape Town in the Cape Town city centre. Many of the companies (n=11) were not based in the Cape Town city centre so had no idea where the training venue was. Managers stated that their employees expressed unhappiness at the lack of detail given to them and requested that details on parking, the venue and the trainers name be sent to them in the future.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The business case for the SME voucher-training system was prepared by Richard Mokgata in March 2009. This document serves as the policy document used for the SME voucher-training programme of 2010, 2011 and 2012. The document states that the training of employees within the SMEs in the wholesale and retail sector is not adequate due to factors such as a small workforce within the company, lack of training funds within the SMEs and the training periods that do not match SMEs business off peaks (2009, p. 3). According to the business case, the SETA relies heavily on an electronic system for the administration and management of this project (2009, p. 5). The system provides unlimited real-time management information that could be customized to meet templates or requirements of the Department of Labour and other stakeholders to the W&R SETA. The policy document states that the system is a financial and management information system (2009, p. 5). The business case covers all aspects of the project management approach to the voucher programme and includes audit trails that can provide auditors with both statutory and forensic data (2009, p. 9). The business case however does not cover any aspect of programme quality or the impact of the training on small businesses. The system does not allow for the lifelong learning experiences of learners who attended the training sessions to be analysed and reported. Although the SETA received an unqualified audit report by the Auditor General for the past ten years and was awarded the Good Practice in Skills Development by the Minister of Labour in 2008 (W&R SETA, 2010/2011, p. 5) there is no measurement to determine the success of the voucher-training programme other than the number of people who participated and the workshop feedback forms private providers have used. These feedback forms reflect the quality of the training workshop and do not give an indication of the managers' perceptions of the lifelong learning experiences the employees might have gained.

The business case also gives clarity on the timeframes for the implementation of the programme and states that the private providers should avoid training in months such as December and January, and to synchronise the system's implementation with financial year runs (2009, p. 9). Feedback from all fourteen respondents (n=14) in the study has stated that the winter months are most suitable for their training. These are their least busy periods and it would not be very problematic if employees were away from the workplace for a short period of time. The document also states that communication via email is the most effective way to communicate with all parties and stakeholders. All fourteen respondents (n=14) preferred if all their communication from the SETA came to them from their Skills Development Facilitator who is their SETA liaison as appointed by the SETA. They stated that they received spam and only read emails from their Skills

Development Facilitator. The business case notes that the roles of the Independent Skills Development Facilitators (ISDFs) should be optimised during this project (2009, p. 6).

The policy for the most part suffices as it is but needs clarity on the quality and monitoring of the learning after the training sessions are over. Even if the SETA or private provider requests written feedback or makes telephonic enquiries to the small business manager to get their feedback on the programme, this must be done in order to measure of the success or failure of the voucher-training programme. Finally, the policy needs to give clarity on the type of training programmes to be offered. The Minister of Education (Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 2) argued that much of the training facilitated and funded through the skills development levy is of questionable quality. Almost 70% of the training is in short courses that do not lead to a qualification (Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 2). Clarity on whether the learning programmes are non-credit bearing short courses or unit standard based and aligned and lead to a qualification would help the provider and the small business manager ensure that learners attend programmes that are suited to either beginners, intermediate or advanced levels. This would also alleviate the frustrations noted by respondents thirteen and five that their employees expressed unhappiness at the training sessions because there were different levels of learners in the class and the full benefit of the course could not be appreciated because it was too rushed and the trainer was pushed for time.

The implications of this study indicate that small business managers are actively involved in the lifelong learning of the employees who work for them. Their perceptions of the voucher-training programme are based not just on the behaviours of their employees after they returned from the voucher-training interventions but on the programme choices they made for their (and at times, with their) employees *before* they went on the training. Svensen (2007, p. 815) maintains that one of the factors that strengthen a small business is the role of the manager in the day to day running of the business and their hands on approach to workplace learning. The respondents' hands on approach to initially making the decisions regarding which programmes to send employees on were based on their knowledge of the sector and needs of their business and employees. Whilst Svensen (2007, p. 815) argues that the role of the small business manager is not always positive in that managers do not want to get involved with the learning and development of their employees and want to focus on operational aspects of the business, this study shows that all fourteen respondents (n=14) took an active role in their employees learning and development by participating in the voucher-training programme.

In this study, respondents five and seven respectively offer counselling to employees should they experience any problems and scheduled training sessions on days other than the employees days off and Saturday afternoons, as managers are aware that employees have problems with transport on Saturday afternoons. This caring nature echoes Collins (2007, p. 152) sentiment that small business managers always take their employees wellbeing into account. Spencer (2007, p. 796) maintains that workplace learning allows employees to develop and improve their people skills and

understand how their particular job impacts the workplace and the global world. The skills respondents (n=11) observed, after their employees returned from the voucher-training sessions, indicate that the training influenced employees in a positive manner. Respondent six in particular was excited that her employees were able to now listen and interpret what clients were trying to say in the workplace. Respondent twelve was impressed that part of the training session his employees attended focussed on the National Credit Act (2006) and its impact on the economy. Since attending the training sessions, employees became more confident, were team players, produced quality work and enjoyed their jobs. This was also noted in the study conducted by the Centre for Workplace Skills (2011, p. 9) where employees became more confident, were team players, produced quality work and enjoyed their jobs after attending workplace learning sessions.

Learning done at work can provide a richer experience for both the employee and the organisation (Bibby, 2007, p. 67). To grow, an organisation must build its strength internally, especially with the employees. An organisation cannot build its strength outside if it cannot build strength at home (Bhattacharjee, 2009, p. 152). The voucher-training programme was offered to all small business stakeholders in the wholesale and retail sector. The fourteen small business managers in this research study chose to empower their employees and build their strength internally by sending their employees on the free training opportunity offered by the SETA. Although the training sessions were not held at the workplace, the effects of the training fostered good relations between the managers and the employees (R11). Employees felt that they were involved in the small business and communications between management and employees improved. Employees also became productive and motivated and started to implement new things (R 12, 6 & 9). Certain employees attended training programmes which were not in their line of work because they were simply interested in furthering their knowledge (R1). Grosjean (2007, p. 300) refers to this as the Mode 3 of learning that is derived from the learners own initiative.

Learning should be embedded in everyday practises (Fenwick, 2010, p. 151). This makes the perceptions and insights of the small business managers, into how effective they deem the voucher programmes to be on their employees, essential as they see the everyday work practises of their employees.

Hodkinson (2007, p. 395) argues that it is important to understand workplace learning within the context of a person's whole life. Working and learning at work should be seen in conjunction with the person's whole life, which encompasses their family, community, and social lives where learning also takes place. WPL in this sense can be seen as part of lifelong learning or, as Hodkinson calls it, the "life course" (2007, p. 395). Respondent seven stated that in his opinion his employees live in a very small world. They pack dried fruit in a packet all day and when employees go home, they are not exposed to anything that stimulates them mentally. His perception of his employees was that they felt they were only good enough to put a product in a packet. These were employees who lacked of confidence and came from a previously disadvantaged background.

Boughton (2007, p. 81) argues that from a socio-political perspective, it is essential that teaching people how to overcome their insecurities and stimulating their thinking are included in workplace learning programmes. Respondent seven argues that learning programmes such as life skills and motivation are needed to further the training needs of his employees in order to help them overcome their insecurities and empower them.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The South African Minister for Higher and Further Education and Training, Blade Nzimande maintained that due to a lack of proper accountability, many SETAs have drifted away from their core mandate (Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 2). Their effectiveness since their establishment in 2000 have been varied and they are generally not associated with best practise (James, 2012, p. 1). The Green Paper on Post School Education (2012, p. 62) argues that the performance of the SETAs has been unpredictable and in many cases has not met expectations. There is consequently not much academic research on SETAs in South Africa. Research information from the SETAs is restricted to the information found in their Sector Skills Plan (SSP) and from their website. The report from the Ministerial Task Team on SETA performance (Republic of South Africa, 2013, p. 52) argues that there continues to be inadequate information on research and planning available on demand from SETAs and recommends that the research function of SETAs be performed through partnerships with other organisations. The limitations of this topic on the voucher-training programme offered by the Wholesale and Retail SETA to small business managers, made this research study a challenge to handle. It is hoped that this study excites more research on the SETAs and workplace learning in small business development in South Africa.

Other limitations to this study would be the lack of the employee perspective on the effect of the voucher-training programme. To determine if the small business managers' perceptions are accurate, it would have been appropriate to focus on the employees and their perceptions. This would give a more holistic and balanced view and understanding of the voucher-training programme. Grossman and Salas (2011, p. 105) predominant arguments about the transfer of learning focusses on looking at how the designing of training programmes can help facilitate the transfer of knowledge learnt whilst employees are on training, back to the workplace, and the training of researchers to explore deeper the influences that affect the transfer of learning (2011, p. 105). Abernathy (1999, p. 19) focusses on evaluation of training and development. Both topics could lead to a deeper understanding of the effects of the voucher-training programme on employees but are outside the scope of this thesis. As this is a mini thesis, I chose my focus to be on the small business managers' perspective of the effects of the voucher-training programme on their employees. The perceptions of small business managers hold the key to determining the effectiveness of the voucher-training programme on employees. These managers ultimately decide who should attend the training interventions, and whether these programmes are suitable for their staff as they are already familiar with their business and employees' needs. Employees may attend

the training interventions offered by the SETA, but whether their managers think these training interventions are able to grow their employees in terms of their lifelong learning is unclear. The perceptions of the managers are also important for the sustainability of the voucher programme in the small business workplace in order to develop insights about possible improvements to the voucher-training programme. Employee perceptions of the effects of the voucher-training programme was however beyond the scope of the mini thesis.

Panagiotakopoulos (2011, p. 15) states that most small business owners are driven by short term business pressures and are preoccupied by their active involvement in the daily activities of the enterprise. The small business managers' perceptions of the effects of the voucher-training programme on their employees could then possibly not be very accurate in that they would be preoccupied with their daily involvement of their business. They may not have been very diligent about looking for behaviour change in their employees post-training.

5.4 SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The scope of this study was to investigate perceptions of small business managers of the voucher-training programme offered by the W&R SETA. This study was limited to identifying the rationale of managers for selecting training programmes, to describing the managers' perceptions of the effects of the training interventions on behaviour of the employees, to identifying manager's perceptions of further training needs for employees, and to exploring the managers' insights about possible improvements to the voucher-training programme. The views of the employees and the training providers could also add valuable insights to ensure a thorough understanding of the voucher-training programme – this was however beyond the scope of this study (which constituted a 50% thesis). In some instances, the perceptions of small business managers do not favour the training providers and the SETA. Feedback from the provider and the SETA would therefore ensure a more balanced view of the training and learning programmes and the implementation of the entire voucher-training system. Feedback from the small business managers could be done six months after the employees returned from the training sessions. This will ensure that the feedback from the small business managers is fresh and current. To understand why the small business managers perceived that the content of some of the programmes were not suitable for their employees, would involve studying the training manuals of the programme and debating whether their perceptions were valid. There is therefore scope for further future research in this field. Feedback from the employees could be a research project that stands on its own. There is not much research that indicate how training is transferred back to the workplace. Grossman and Salas (2011, p.104) state that a lot of the training companies invest in training that do not transfer back to the job. They argue that although employees may gain new knowledge and skills through attending training programmes, this is not sufficient for training to be considered effective. The knowledge gained during training needs to be transferred to the workplace and in turn needs to lead to productive changes in the workplace. This could be seen in the employee's performance at

work. Employees in small businesses are assigned to broadly defined roles and this may make it easier for small business managers to create opportunities for trainees to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills. This study might make a contribution to knowledge on training in small businesses.

Feedback from the providers who participated in the voucher-training programme could be considered another research project. Ultimately, it is up to the researcher to decide on the scope for future research in this field and to believe that the scope of the study they choose will influence social conditions in some way (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007, p. 404).

5.5 CONCLUSION

The question of whether or not the small business managers' perceptions of the voucher-training programme are essential in order to develop insights into the possible improvements and sustainability of the programme leads to further discussion on the topic. Whilst the respondents spoke with passion and honesty about their impression of the voucher-training programme and its influences, or lack thereof, on their employees, the question arises of how objective are the small business managers in their feedback. Direct feedback from the employees, the training providers who participated in the programme and the W&R SETA themselves would lend itself to a fuller understanding of the influences of the voucher-training programme on employees. However, for this 50% mini-thesis, the rationale used by the small business managers for selecting training programmes, their perceptions of the possible effects of the training intervention on employee behaviour, their identifying learning programmes to develop the further training needs of their employees, and their own personal insights about the possible improvements to the programme give a view into how management perceive the success of the voucher-training programme. For the purpose of this research project, this is enough to determine the following:

- Objectives 1 & 3: if the short courses chosen by the SETA do in fact provide skills with immediate effect on the small business or whether the SETA should expand on the range of programmes they offer. Feedback from the respondents indicates that all the respondents (n=14) were happy with the programme choices. The specific levels at which the programmes were offered need clarity if the programme is to be sustained.
- Objectives 2 & 4: the perceived behaviours of employees after they attended the workshops indicate both positive influences and situations where there was little influence or none at all. The insights these small business managers provide on how to possibly improve the voucher-training programme indicate a thorough knowledge of their business and operational requirements which the SETA and providers need to pay careful attention to if this programme is to be sustainable.

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**ANNEXURE A:
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**PERCEPTIONS OF SMALL BUSINESS MANAGERS ON
THE EFFECTS OF THE VOUCHER-TRAINING
PROGRAMME OFFERED BY THE WHOLESALE AND
RETAIL SECTOR, EDUCATION AND TRAINING
AUTHORITY.**

Interview Schedule:

Name of company:	
SDL Number:	
Name of SETA:	
Physical Address:	
Contact details: (Cell)	(Work)
Number of employees in company:	
Core business:	
SDF for company:	

Objective 1: identify the rationale of managers for selecting training programmes	
1.1. Give reasons why you selected these specific training programmes for staff to attend.	
Objective 2: describe the managers' perceptions of the effects of the training interventions on behaviour of the employees	
2.1 Did you notice any change in your employees after these training programmes?	
2.2 Explain your answer.	
2.3 How did these training interventions affect their productivity in the workplace?	
Objective 3: identify managers' perceptions of further training needs for employees	
3.1 Why were these training programmes appropriate or not appropriate for your staff?	
3.2 What programmes would suit employees in your company? Give reasons why.	
Objective 4: Develop insights about possible improvements to the voucher-training system	
4.1 How did you hear of the voucher-training programme?	
4.2 How would you prefer to hear of the voucher-training programme or any other initiatives the SETA may have for your company?	
4.3 List the administration procedures you had to follow to access these vouchers.	
4.4 What were the difficulties you may have experienced with the system?	
4.5 What would you recommend the SETA or the private provider do to improve the programme?	
4.6 List the programmes you would like to see offered by the SETA.	
4.7 How long would you recommend these programmes to be?	
4.8 At what point in the year should these programmes be offered?	
4.9 What measures should be put in place to deal with non attendance and drop out?	
4.10 General comments:	
Name:	Designation:
Signature:	Date:
Interviewer:	
Signature:	

ANNEXURE B

DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS IN STUDY

Respondent	Position	Type of SME	Trading days	Location	Number of employees at time of the study
1	Finance Manager	Décor retail store	7 days a week	Waterfront in Cape Town	39
2	General Manager	Three retail branches that specialise in hardware and tools	6 days a week	Paarden Island, Parrow and Montague Gardens	21 25 20
3	Finance Manager	Wholesale company of luggage	5 days a week	Greenpoint	11
4	Finance Manager	Wholesale company that specialises in music and software	5 days a week	Montague Gardens	27
5	Finance Manager	Retail hardware store	7 days a week	Platteklouf	45
6	Finance Manager	Two small companies that specialises in the wholesale and retail of heavy duty pumps	5 days a week	Montague Gardens	10 26
7	Part owner and Manager	Dried fruit wholesale company	5 days a week	Stikland	10
8	Owner and Manager	Heavy duty wholesale wood factory	5 days a week	Epping Industria	11
9	Finance Manager of three small companies'	Wholesale and retail of heavy duty pipes, pumps and other hardware	6 days a week.	Stikland	32 16 7
10	Finance and	Retail medical supplies	5 days a week	West Beach	9

	Marketing Manager				
11	Part owner/ Member	Bathroom wholesale supply company	5 days a week	Beaconvale in Parrow	15
12	Finance Manager	Retail chain that specialises in the sales of tobacco and games	7 days a week	Edgemead	42
13	Owner/ Finance Manager	Wholesaler of cycling equipment	5 days a week	Observatory	16
14	Owner/ Finance Manager	Wholesaler of sports equipment	5 days a week	Stikland.	10

