

## **HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT (HCD) THROUGH OPEN, DISTANCE AND E-LEARNING: Evidence From Corporate Annual Reports (Cars) of Top South African Listed Companies**

**Dr. MO ADELOWOTAN**  
(FCA; Professional Accountant {SA})  
Distance Learning Institute,  
University of Lagos, Lagos, NIGERIA

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the role of open, distance and e-learning in the development of human resources by examining human capital development related disclosures in the corporate annual reports (CARs) of top South African listed companies. The study employed content analysis method to analyse the CARs of these companies with the aid of qualitative analysis software known as Atlasti. The results show that open, distance and e-learning plays a significant role in the development of human capital in the new economy organisations.

**Keywords:** Open, distance and e-learning, human capital, human resources, human capital development, human capital disclosures, corporate annual reports, new economy organisations and South African listed companies.

### **INTRODUCTION**

A clear legacy of apartheid regime in South Africa is intense political conflict and socio-cultural divisions along race, colour and class lines. Therefore, this paper focuses on South Africa because the globalisation of the South African economy has seen not only a transition to political democracy but also the transition to economic liberation, with the resultant effect that South African companies now face complex new challenges of ensuring that they have the leadership, business and technical capacity to succeed in a changing business environment. Other reasons are the shortage of skilled labour in South Africa, shift in market power from employer to employee in the South African economy and the rampaging effects of HIV/AIDS epidemics on human capital in South Africa (Boninelli & Meyer 2004: 102).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Human capital (HC) as distinct from economic capital is also referred as the combination of factors owned by individual employees and the collective workforce of an organisation (Abeysekera, 2008:16). Hence, HC is made up of the intellectual skills and capabilities, knowledge obtained through education and training which consequently allow an individual to execute given tasks more effectively and productively. It is generally recognised as an intangible resource capable of creating value for organisations (Meritum (2002:63).

Human capital also includes personal traits such as intelligence; energy; attitude; reliability; commitment; ability to learn, aptitude; imagination; creativity; desire to share information, participate in a team, and focus on the goals of the firm (Abeysekera, 2008:16). HC has been described as the source of innovation and strategic renewal regardless of where it originates, whether it originates from arranging files and other clerical works to brainstorming, re-engineering and problem solving. The used and the useful knowledge of an employee is the source of human capital resources. Apparently, the common assertion that people are the most important resource is both right and true. The post apartheid transformation agenda includes the promulgation of legislations aimed at addressing the imbalance created by the apartheid regime and to provide the human capital needs of the post-apartheid South Africa, some of these legislations are:

### **Skills Development Act (1998)**

The Skills Development Act aims:

- to develop the skills of the South African workforce;
- to improve the quality of life of workers and their prospects of work; and
- to improve productivity in the workplace and the competitiveness of employers and to promote self-employment.

### **Employment Equity Act, 1998**

The Act recognises that as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices, there are disparities in employment, occupation and income within the national labour market; and that those disparities create such pronounced disadvantages for certain categories of people that they cannot be redressed simply by repealing discriminatory laws, The Act therefore aims:

- to promote the constitutional right of equality and the exercise of true democracy;
- to eliminate unfair discrimination in employment;
- to ensure the implementation of employment equity to redress the effects of discrimination;
- to achieve a diverse workforce broadly representative of our people;
- to promote economic development and efficiency in the workplace; and
- to give effect to the obligations of the Republic as a member of International Labour Organisation.

### **Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003**

The objectives of this Act are to facilitate broad-based black economic empowerment by:

- promoting economic transformation in order to enable meaningful participation of black people in the economy;
- achieving a substantial change in the racial composition of ownership and management structures and in the skilled occupations of existing and new enterprises;
- increasing the extent to which communities, workers, cooperatives and other collective enterprises own and manage existing and new enterprises and increasing their access to economic activities, infrastructure and skills training;

- increasing the extent to which black women own and manage existing and new enterprises, and increasing their access to economic activities, infrastructure and skills training;
- promoting investment programmes that lead to broad-based and meaningful participation in the economy by black people in order to achieve sustainable development and general prosperity;
- empowering rural and local communities by enabling access to economic activities, land, infrastructure, ownership and skills; and
- promoting access to finance for black economic empowerment.

Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) is becoming more and more relevant in developing human capital particularly in developing countries where the emphasis of the government is on the provision of equal educational opportunities to all citizens particularly at the and college and university levels. Therefore, ODeL has been adopted as a means of addressing the inequalities in educational opportunities and human resources needs particularly in Africa.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Generally, content analysis technique involves codifying of systematically, objectively and reliably qualitative and quantitative information into pre-defined categories in order to derive patterns in the presentation and reporting of information (Guthrie, Petty, Yongvanich & Ricceri 2004:287).

To analyse the extent of voluntary disclosure of human capital, this research study will use content analysis to ascertain the patterns and context of human capital disclosure in the form of employee related learning, training and education from the Corporate Annual Reports (CARs) of 60 out of the top 100 JSE listed companies. This analytical content analysis was undertaken to discover the nature and extent of disclosures relating to human capital development in the annual reports between years 2010 to 2012. The content analysis was performed with the aid of qualitative analysis software known as Atlasti.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The following extracts in the corporate annual reports of some of the top South African companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange relate to reports on employees' related learning, training and education.

### **P 1: AECI-Integrated Report-2011:50**

*"During the reporting period Heartland provided training for four apprentices in the Mechanical and Electrical disciplines and five unemployed learners received training in Analytical Chemistry, Property Valuation, Accounting and Environmental Sciences".*

### **P 2: African Bank Inv. Ltd-Integrated Report-2011:35**

*"The group recently launched Financial Care Centres for employees to help assist debt problems. We also extended our training programmes and won awards for our Learnerships and other initiatives".*

**P 3: Allied Technologies Limited-Integrated Report-2012:46**

*"King III determines the Altech board's approach to good business governance and accordingly, non-financial measures are becoming crucial in evaluating our overall performance, sustainability and our impact on the economy, society and the environment. Therefore, it is a pleasure for me to congratulate Altech management and employees on a number of highlights for the year:- We created 153 learnerships across the various operations during the year compared to 55 in 2011 and almost all of the learners were historically disadvantaged individuals. The majority of learnerships (around 70%) remained with Altech at the end of the programme".*

**P 5: Anglo-American PLC-Annual Report-2011:36**

*"We have seen a marked increase in the number of employees that have been exposed to our AO Academy training, which is aimed at equipping our people with the right skills and business improvement mindset required to deliver AO results for the business. In the next phase of AO skills development we will incorporate the use of advanced technology and more interactive learning environments, thus making AO a more tangible reality for our people and the organization".*

**P 7: Aquarius Platinum Ltd-Annual Report-2011:13**

*"AQPSA spent a total of R25.2 million on training and development in FY2011. An additional R20 million was paid to contractor Murray & Roberts Cementation (MRC) who oversaw the adult basic education and training (ABET) programme at the new training centre at Kroondal, and for the management of the learnership training and bursars' programme during the year".*

**P 8: Arcelormittal South Africa Ltd-Annual Report-2011:23**

*"Skills development for South Africa. We are justifiably proud of our active support for national skills development efforts. Our programme commences with basic education and introduces thousands of learners from disadvantaged areas to maths, science and English at high school level through our three science centres. This extensive initiative prepares thousands of young South Africans for tertiary education and enables the most talented to progress right through to engineering degrees and technical diplomas with financial assistance from ArcelorMittal".*

**P 9: Aspen Pharmacare Holding Ltd-Annual Report-2011:19; 48; 63;64**

*"Investment has been made in supporting more learnership and apprenticeship programmes to mitigate the risk of skills shortages in South Africa. Investment was also made in structured skills development, functional and managerial training programmes in alignment with business objectives, to ensure sustainability of Aspen's human capital".*

***"Functional and compliance update courses continue to be conducted at Aspen Bad Oldesloe where the level of skills and competence employed is inherently high. At Shelys and Aspen Brazil the implementation of the new Enterprise Resource Planning systems was prioritised during the year and hence externally procured training was limited. In East Africa, preliminary assessment sessions for world class manufacturing, fire fighting and HIV/AIDS awareness took place during the year. In Brazil e-learning courses were introduced in respect of marketing strategies, product attributes and marketing dynamics. Administration staff at Aspen Venezuela attended English courses. In addition in-house sales training was conducted for all sales representatives in the Venezuelan business whilst in Mexico employees were trained on GMP, health and safety and senior manager coaching".***

***"In total 228 learnerships are supported in South Africa, 96% of which represent historically disadvantaged individuals. During the year, 103 learners in South Africa successfully completed learnerships and apprenticeship programmes. Learnership programmes target the development of a scarce skills pool in South Africa which includes:***

- 12 productivity learnerships;
- 12 mechanical apprenticeships;
- 20 pharmacist assistants learnerships;
- 23 team leader learnerships; and
- 36 chemical operations learnerships".

***"In the International business, 15 learnerships are in place at Aspen Bad Oldesloe in the areas of logistics, manufacturing and engineering. One learnership is in place at Aspen Venezuela in accordance with legislation. In this country, companies are obliged to subsidise towards school fees for students who, after completing their schooling, join a company for a period of 15 months for practical work experience".***

**P13: Capitec Bank Holdings Ltd-Int. Report-2012:14**

***"Management and control. The drive continues to empower employees through leadership training and further professional development. Strategies have been put in place to accelerate leadership development to ensure that transfer of learning takes place with effective coaching to support performance, growth and succession. During the period under review, 654 employees (9.2% of workforce) received leadership training. Performance of all employees is evaluated at least annually consisting of an interim and final assessment".***

**P13: Capitec Bank Holdings Ltd-Int. Report-2012:20; 21**

***"During the year under review a total of 574 learning and development workshops were offered, attended by 7 035 employees. Firm Foundations is the main training platform where new employees are schooled in the Capitec Bank".***

*"The bank has also continued with its drive to enhance its distance learning capability. During the past year, up to 50 learning modules and quizzes have been made available on our e-village system, which enabled the bank to reach more than 5 518 learners".*

**P16: Exxaro Resources Limited-Int.Report-2011:22; 24**

*"5, 7% of total salaries and wages spent on human resources development. Our own technical training centres train artisans at a cost of R32 million per annum. Considerable investment in schools to ensure quality of learners".*

*"During the year, we continued our broader focus on skills development, enrolling 175 new engineering learners, eight mining learners, 14 operator learners, and 19 plant learners for the Grootegeluk Medupi expansion project".*

**P17: FirstRand Ltd.-Annual report 2011:42**

- *"continuously developing existing skills bases;*
- *building strong future skills pipelines for expansion and growth;*
- *opening skills acquisition to those not yet in employment; and*
- *engaging with government, trade unions, learning institutions and other corporations on responding to South Africa's skills development".*

**P23: JD Group-Int. Report-2011:67; 69;71**

*"The majority of training is conducted electronically and e-learning programmes have been implemented throughout the organisation. These enable Blake to rapidly train school leavers to become qualified client facing agents, including a highly successful learnership programme with government".*

*"During the review period, JD Group distributed R1,2 million (2010: R1,1 million) in supporting young disadvantaged learners, while a further R932 000 was allocated to employees and their children in the learning environment. The table below reflects the statistics of the Group's training initiatives for the past year per race group and gender category, as well as the financial value of the interventions".*

*"Lifelong learning that support the continued employability of employees and assist them in managing career endings".*

**P24: JSE Limited-Int. Report-2011:37**

*"The JSE engages with its employees in many ways and is committed to supporting the development of its people. The exchange prides itself on the people it employs and therefore encourages an environment where people feel valued. This is achieved through people policies and team practices, which are focused on:*

- *Empowerment of others and self, linked to accountability*
- *Investment in people and continuous learning*
- *A high-performance culture"*

**P26: Life Healthcare Integrated Annual Report 2011:29-30; 31;32**

*"Training and education initiatives through the Life College of Learning as well as universities. Life Healthcare, through its Life College of Learning which has a geographical spread of 10 learning centres, trains over 1 000 nurses a year, with 1 444 nurses enrolled this year. The college is registered with the Department of Education as a private higher and further education institution, and accredited by the Council for Higher Education as well as by the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education".*

*"The Life College of Learning offers programmes in management development, hospital management, health sciences and life skills, as well as ongoing professional training of nurses. The college had another year of excellent results in the registered examinations, reflecting the professionalism of our clinical and management educators. Our training and personal development initiatives for staff at all levels are designed to develop and progress the talent within the Group".*

*"Recognising the importance of education, Life Healthcare also provided 110 staff bursaries and 103 bursaries for employees' children to study for a tertiary qualification. On merit, managers may be offered education at master's degree level. The total contribution for these bursaries in 2011 was R2.5 million. We have also developed a pipeline of critical skills for our hospitals through the Life College of Learning".*

**P27: Massmart-Int. Report-2011:41; 44**

*"Participated in Wholesale and Retail SETA-funded learnerships which address scarce skills. Of the total 128 employees registered on learnerships, more than 98% were black. The huge increase in learnerships is due to the SETA offering funding for projects to address scarce skills shortages and give unemployed graduates workplace experience. We also employed 63 people with disabilities and 32 employees with a hearing disability were enrolled in Adult Education and Training learnerships".*

**P28: Mediclinic-Int. Report-2011:18; 19**

*"A total of 641 learners completed undergraduate programmes and 83 learners completed postgraduate programmes during the 2011 academic year. a further 911 learners completed in-house structured Mediclinic programmes. 703 learners and students were upskilled at 27 educational institutions; 599 of these were in medical disciplines. In addition, there are numerous trainee positions".*

**P30: MTN Group Ltd-Int. Report-2011:46**

*"The MTN Academy also launched an e-learning system called e-Live 61:2347) (Super) MTN uses the Metrics that Matter global benchmarking solution to measures delegates' experiences of learning services provided by the MTN Academy and its strategic partners.*

*In terms of the effectiveness measure (meaning significant knowledge and skills were gained), MTN Academy courses scored 87, 8%. On the value measure (which means training was considered a very worthwhile investment), MTN Academy courses scored 85,4%. Both these scores were significantly higher”.*

**P31: Murray & Roberts Ltd-Int. Report-2011:47; 64**

*“CapaCITY dEVELOpmEnT. Building world-class leadership, as well as individual and organizational capability and capacity, is crucial to our Recovery and Growth strategy in the years ahead. The Group complies with prevailing skills development legislation and provides a range of training, learning and career development opportunities for its people. In 2011, investment in formal employee training and development was approximately R116 million (2010: R117 million), including wages and salaries of participants and capital expenditure in upgrading training facilities. Approximately 10 000 employees undertook formal skills enhancement and training development during the year”.*

*“nOnKUIUleKO KUbeka: I was awarded a bursary through the Letsema Khanyisa Employee Benefits Trust in 2007. The Murray & Roberts’ bursary funded the full three years of my undergraduate studies. As a result of this bursary I was able to study and complete a BA Corporate Communication degree at the University of Johannesburg. I am also proud to be the first graduate from the pool of learners that received bursaries”.*

**P33: Naspers-Int. Report-2011:32**

*“Skills development is multifaceted. The company’s learnership programmes combine vocational education and training modules towards qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)”.*

**P34: Nedbank Group Ltd-Int. Report-2011:69**

*“Learnerships – Nedbank Group embraces and encourages lifelong learning for all. To this end the group offers employment opportunities to unemployed youth via its participation in BankSETA initiatives such as the Letsema and Kuyasa learnerships. This also ensures that the group contributes to the broader SA transformation agenda. During 2011 Nedbank Group offered various learnerships to 109 unemployed individuals, 99% of whom were black. In addition 64% of the 138 learners who were in the programme in 2010 were employed by the bank, and 50,5% were employed in 2011”.*

**P37: Optimum Coal Holdings Ltd-Int. Report-2011:18**

*“While internal training and skills development initiatives help to develop our existing talent, externally focused programmes assist to attract scarce skills to our business. These include two bursary programmes-one that targets the Company’s immediate skills needs and one that benefits community members-and a learnership programme”.*

**P38: Pick n Pay-Int. Report-2011:17**

*"Sustaining the well-being, enthusiasm and commitment of over 36 000 people is a critical success factor. To this end we have 140 essential focused learning processes and 270 development opportunities/programmes across the company".*

**P39: Pioneer Foods-Int. Report-2011.pdf - 39:28; 32; 33;35**

*"To bolster our scarce skills pipelines, we have 103 registered apprenticeships, 30 graduate internships and 20 bursars and a significant number of people in the various learnership programmes. The Group is also at an advanced stage in the development of curricula and learning solutions for prioritised job families to develop functional competence. The Group is aware of the unemployment challenges in South Africa, which is exacerbated by the vast pool of unskilled and semi-skilled labour. The Company's approach to this challenge is two-fold:*

- provision of job opportunities wherever practically possible; and
- skills development through various learning interventions.
- Learning interventions include apprenticeships, learnerships, bursary schemes, in-service training, graduate internship programmes, adult basic education and training, functional training and leadership development programmes to enable employability of people. The Group has invested approximately R28.3 million in the various learning and development interventions. Of this amount, R19.5 million has been spent on black employees".

**P40: Pretoria Portland Cement Company Ltd-Int. Report-2011:41; 23**

*"In 2010, Bongani was awarded his BTech degree from UNISA. His advice to others: Don't give up, keep putting in hard work and if you fail, try again, PERSEVERE. Take responsibility for your career. Don't wait for someone to come along and do it for you-take action. Embrace change, it's the only constant in life. For PPC, Bongani Zwane is a living proof of the Kambuku principle of learning for growth. After much hard work, Bongani Zwane achieved ABET level 4+ (NQF1). This determined young man could now see his future, and it was vastly different. He went on to complete a national diploma in production management in 2009, and then enrolled at the PPC operation academy where he completed his NQF4 qualification in carbonated materials manufacturing processes. His personal highlight of this experience was that he was the only one in his class who passed financial management on the first attempt and his budgeting assignment is currently being used as a benchmark for future learners".*

**P48: Sasol-Int. Report-2011:17; 36**

*"Our learning strategy is based on lifelong learning, where standard curriculum-based education is combined with on-the-job application. We offer various training programmes that focus on a balance between leadership, managerial and technical competence.*

*The development of management and technical skills within Sasol is an integral part of our human resources strategy. Sasol's learning strategy balances standardised curriculum-based learning with on-the-job application to achieve a culture of lifelong learning. To develop future talent, Sasol runs one of the largest bursary schemes in South Africa with total investment last year of R39 million. Our primary focus is on developing talent in science, technology and engineering".*

**P50: Spar Annual Report 2011:13**

*"SPAR continues to comply with the Skills Development Act. Developmental focus continues to be placed on technical, supervisory and management competencies which underpin sustainability. The SPAR Academy of Learning, which provides in-house training to both group and retailer employees, maintains its accreditation with the Wholesale and Retail Sector".*

**P53: Sun Int. Ltd-Int. Report-2011:62; 63**

*"Developing our employees' skills and competencies remains a critical part of our learning and development strategy. Over the past year, significant effort went into the development of programmes to address skills gaps at foundational levels. In addition, we focussed strongly on the development of our management teams at various levels of our leadership pipeline. In addition to investing in learning programmes, we focused on developing a learning infrastructure which supports our goal of becoming a true 'learning organisation'. We set aside a total of R923 760 to implement a learning management system (LMS) and a learning dashboard which will better enable us to: manage the learning function, gather business intelligence, and track trends across the Group. We will continue to invest close to R1.8 million on LMS user licences over the next three years".*

**P54: Telkom Int. Report-2011:69; 70**

*"Programmes for skills management and lifelong learning. Training and development: Our Centre for Learning (CFL), which has six regional campuses, is dedicated to unlocking the potential of all our employees through flexible and relevant development solutions. In addition to the campuses we also offer computer-based training".*

**Tongaat Hulett -Intreport-2012:21**

*"Bursaries, scholarships, trainee programmes and learnerships continue to be sponsored by the company to assist with sourcing and developing young talent in anticipation of future skills requirements. To support these programmes, strong partnerships have been formed with select educational institutions and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Workplace skills plans and implementation reports are submitted to the relevant SETA on an annual basis".*

**P58: Truworths Intreport-2011:38; 37**

*"During the period we invested in training over 9 500 employees, an increase of 25% on the prior period, while almost 3 500 people were trained to develop scarce skills. A total of 93% of employees trained were black. Learning interventions across the Group increased by 20% to more than 55 000.*

- 9 521 employees trained (2010: 7 610).
- 55 184 learning interventions (2010: 46 140).
- 3 488 employees trained in scarce skills”.

From the results of the content analysis, companies report on series of learning programmes designed to develop their human capital.

Majority of the employees are encouraged to enroll for courses and programmes through various external educational institutions and in-house learning centres.

These companies also report on the huge capital outlay being devoted to human capital training and development as well as the categories and numbers of employees trained during the period of reporting.

These actions are in line with the objectives of the Skills Development Act of 1998, Employment Equity Act of 1998 and the Broad Based Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 in South Africa. The development of management and technical skills within these organisations form an integral part of their human resources strategy which could only be realised through lifelong learning facilitated by ODeL institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The general conclusion from the content analysis of the Corporate Annual Reports of some top South African listed companies is that ODeL is capable of strengthening the human capital base of any country because it enables the learners to acquire knowledge up to university level because it is learner-centred which offers flexible entry requirement with a wide range of choices.

Evidences are from employees who have benefitted from ODeL programmes in some of the annual reports point to its capability of developing human capital base. Apparently, the growing popularity for the adoption of ODeL could be justified; this is a call for policy makers to support this form of educational programme capable of developing human resource base amongst countries of the world.

## BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHOR



**Dr. Michael Olajide ADELOWOTAN** was born on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1965. He had both Bachelor of Science honours degree in Accounting and Masters degree in Accounting at the University of Lagos, Nigeria in 1990 and 1995 respectively. As a recipient of Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship for Open and Distance Learning (ODL), he possessed the Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) in 2006 and a Masters of Arts in

Distance Education (MADE) in 2008 from the Indira Gandhi National Open University, India. He became an associate member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) in 1999 and was awarded a fellow of the Institute in 2009. He is also an associate member of the Chartered Institute of Taxation in Nigeria (CITN) since 2001. He is an examiner to both the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria and the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria. He worked as an auditor, tax consultant and accountant in various organisations between 1992 and 2002.

In November, 2002, he joined the University Of Lagos As A Lecturer II In Accounting At The University's Distance Learning Institute (DLI) currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He has numerous publications in academic and professional journals. In May 2013, Dr. Adelowotan became a member of the South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA) and in June 2013, he completed the degree of Doctor of Accounting Science at the Department of Financial Accounting, University of South.

Dr. MO Olajide ADELOWOTAN  
(FCA; Professional Accountant {SA})  
Distance Learning Institute,  
University of Lagos, Lagos, NIGERIA  
Email: [adelowomo@gmail.com](mailto:adelowomo@gmail.com)

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