'THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY' TRAINING AND LEARNING SOLUTION FOR A SOUTH AFRICAN AIRLINE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The training and development of employees in the airline industry usually take place within a decentralised structure and may result in fragmented and costly initiatives. To improve the current practice a corporate university (CU) model to be implemented in the airline is proposed. For the purpose of the study qualitative interviews were held, human documents were studied and participant observation and the views of employees of the South African airline industry were sought regarding training in general and CUs in particular. The study revealed support for the CU concept because it would encourage continuous learning at all levels in the organisation and would place emphasis on both employee and organisational needs.

Key words
Training and learning solution, South African Airline Industry, corporate university

South Africa suffers from a severe skills shortage. There are various reasons for this state of affairs such as deficient education and training systems, as well as a high level of emigration of skilled personnel (see Corrigan, 2003). Substantial unemployment figures, social and political instability, high crime rates, low productivity levels, globally uncompetitive industries, a lack of investment and high HIV-Aids rates represent factors that have far-reaching implications for both labour demand and supply (see Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk, 1996).

Not surprisingly, various training and development strategies have been developed in an attempt to address these problems (see Gouws, 1997). This is reflected in the White Paper on Education and Training (1995) which resulted in the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Centred around the provision of learning and the integration of knowledge and skills these structures can be transferred to different contexts (see Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk, 2003). These initiatives are generally considered to be successful, provided that key strategic elements of training and development are in place and emphasis is placed on a foundation-training model that facilitates knowledge transfer, learning and eventually skills development.

Utilising what has become known as the corporate university has the potential to ensure that organisations will provide effective training and development for their employees in a continuous learning context. This model is generally regarded to be effective for delivering training in world-class companies (see Gould, 2005). Training strategies outside the corporate university are typically used to implement plans based on proven theories about how people learn, and training models are often developed in terms of understanding their effectiveness and actual outcomes (usually pertaining to something being learned). These are evident in models that have made groundbreaking inroads into the field of human resources in general and training and development in particular. An example of this is the Hierarchical Model of training outcomes (Kirkpatrick 1967, Noe 1996, Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Corporate universities can be defined in various ways. **Firstly**, it may be defined as a "formal entity associated with an organisation that is chartered with providing employees with the skills and understanding they need to help the organisation achieve its business objectives in both the short and the long term. It is more broadly and strategically focused than a traditional training and development function, with a direct connection to achieving the organisation's goals" (Global Learning Resources, Inc, 2005). **Secondly**, it relates to "continuing education, not education and training gained in the pursuit of an academic degree. Courses for professional development are broadly interpreted to be any organised teaching-learning activity dealing with a topic that supports the organisation's needs and plans and is endorsed by the organisation's professional development programme" (Roesner & Walesh, 1998, p. 56). **Finally**, a corporate university is "an educational entity existing outside academia; it is the business sector's response to the rapid changes in information and technology that characterise our society. A companion to the concept of life-long learning, the corporate university enables businesses, both for profit and not for profit, to maintain and expand the expertise of their workforces and, as a result, to secure their positions in the marketplace" (Gould, 1995, p. 508).

From the preceding it is clear that the corporate university, places strong emphasis on continued training and learning together with the attainment of organisational goals and objectives. This approach was highlighted in a study by Roesner and Walesch (1998, p. 57) where a planned, organisation-focused approach included the establishment of a "university" as opposed to an ad hoc, individual-focused approach. Table 1 below highlights the key differences between the two approaches.

The corporate university provides a management structure under which an extensive array of employee learning opportunities can be developed and implemented. "The structure also brings to the table planners who are needed to create the learning vision for tomorrow's employees" (Gould, 2005, p. 512).

Attempting to align the training arm of companies with their vision and strategy these universities were first created in the 1980's (Frazee, 2002). Taylor (2002) explains that one of the first corporate universities or corporate classrooms is the Motorola University, which focuses on providing basic literacy and numeracy training to lower level employees. Corporate universities have also been adapted by British Telecom in the United States, which focuses on retraining in an attempt to meet changing demands and Gemini, Ernst and Young and Boeing where corporate universities are seen as strategic centre. Corporate universities have grown significantly, and as much as 40% of Fortune 500 companies have a corporate university (Hirayama et al, 2004).

TABLE 1
**SPECTRUM OF APPROACHES TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING
PROGRAMMES (ROESNER AND WALESH, 1998, PP. 57)**

"Old" ad hoc, individual-focused	"New" planned, organisation-focused, including a "university"
Most learning is done off-site or in seminars	Learning is accomplished internally and externally in a variety of ways, with the communication mechanism selected on the basis of cost-effectiveness
A place	A process
Individuals in corporate or main office have more training or education opportunities	Equal access to training or education regardless of geographic location
Some participants obtain certificates	Organisation is licensed by the International Association of Continuing Education and Training, to award continuing education credits
Only employees participate	Stakeholders are invited to participate
Organisation "pays all"	Partnerships between individual and organisation
Individual selects subject matter	Organisation selects or approves subject matter
Generous time and expense budget per individual that participates	Limited individual time and expense budgets
	Everyone is expected to participate
Some education and training is viewed as well-earned rest and relaxation	All education and training is "part of the business" and expected to provide a return on the investment

According to Global Learning Resources, Inc. (2005), a corporate university should ideally operate at three levels: **Level 1**: talent planning and strategy; **Level 2**: research, and **Level 3**: development activity design and implementation. At level 1, emphasis is placed on identifying skills requirements and key trends in the labour market; thus in a corporate university skills requirements are matched to trends in the external environment. At level 2, the corporate university focuses on the importance of gathering and interpreting research data; here the idea is to identify areas of weakness that can be rectified through appropriate training and development interventions. Level 3 focuses on the importance of implementing training and development initiatives and emphasises methodologies that can be used to disseminate training, such as e-learning and traditional classroom learning (Global Learning Resources, Inc., 2005).
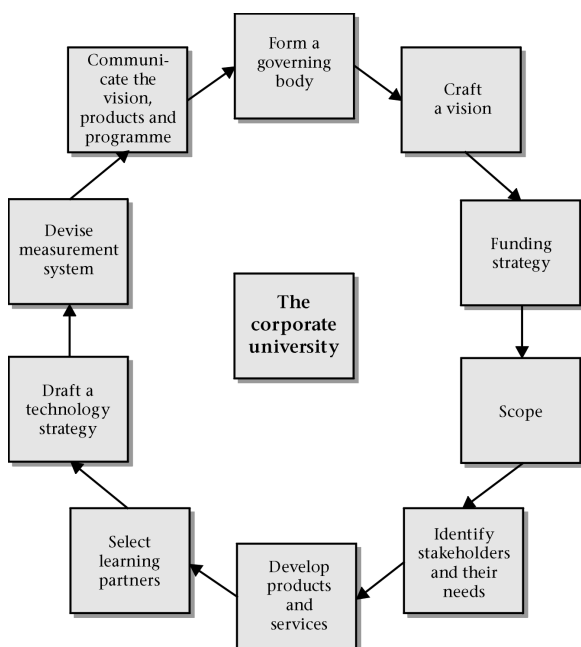

Figure 1: The ten-phased corporate university model

The American Society for Training and Development (Training and Development, 1998, p. 38) has identified **ten steps** for establishing a corporate university. These stages have to be implemented over an 18-month period (Training and Development, 1998, p. 38) since rushing through them is seen as counterproductive and ineffective in implementing a sound corporate university model. In my opinion, the specification of the aforementioned implementation period should be viewed as a minimum time period. While it may be argued that more or less time is required for implementation, it is important to work within timeframes enabling observation and evaluation. Other considerations when implementing the corporate university entail the following:

Firstly, securing support from executive and senior management. A system of governance is required so that the relevant managers can agree on an appropriate vision, as well as outlining the functions of the governing body (Training and Development, 1998).

Secondly, similar to a strategic plan, which is considered to be a roadmap for an organisation, the vision of the corporate university paves the way for the future of training and development (Training and Development, 1998).

Thirdly, organisations need to take cognisance of the resources required to implement corporate universities. While corporate allocations should account for most of a corporate university budget the remainder may be funded through a combination of making charge-backs to the business units, licensing training programmes and exploring the university's capabilities, such as distance learning facilities (Training and Development, 1998, p. 39).

Fourthly, the scope of the corporate university should be viewed in terms of whether the training and development activities need to be centralised or decentralised.

Fifthly, traditional training departments found in organisations usually service internal employees from the organisation and does not extend or develop linkages with other stakeholders such as customers (Frazee, 2002). Hence, the corporate university philosophy allows for a different breadth of audience encompassing the entire value chain, including internal employees, suppliers and customers (Training and Development, 1998, p. 38).

Sixthly, it is imperative to decide on what training programmes to develop because they serve a strategic purpose and will always play a role in guiding future behaviour and best practice (Phillips, 2004).

Seventhly, since a distinctive feature of a corporate university is the extension of its linkages, it is important that guidelines are set in place as to who becomes a learning partner to the university. Whilst organisations may choose to have linkages with learning partners without the corporate university concept, I believe that learning partners are important for the successful implementation of the corporate university. The 1998 Survey of Corporate University Future Directions cited in (Training and Development, 1998, p.41) highlighted selection criteria for training partners. This is summarised in Table 2.

Eighthly, the model focuses on combinations of one-on-one, classroom training and/or technology in delivering the interventions. In addition, some types of training may be executed utilising learning laboratories or online-based training. However, more than a one-on-one interactive approach appears to be most useful where training is required at a higher conceptual level, particularly at senior management and executive level (Athey, 1998).

Ninthly, an evaluation system has to be set in place to assess the extent of knowledge transfer, learning and skills development.

TABLE 2
SELECTION CRITERIA FOR OBTAINING A LEARNING PARTNER

1. A shared mindset in which customer service, innovation and continuous improvement are paramount to success.	2. Flexibility in working with the learning partner, including the ability to teach on site, share libraries, laboratories or equipment.
3. Responsiveness and mutual interest in developing a particular type of curriculum.	4. Complementary needs and goals that range from funding joint research to developing customised executive education programmes.
5. Respected reputation and prestige of the educational institution.	6. The ability to develop collaboratively a clear path of study leading to a new accredited degree programme.
7. Openness to experimenting with technologies to accelerate learning.	8. Ownership rights to intellectual property clearly delineated at the onset of the partnership.
9. Financial and non-financial measures spelled out carefully in advance and agreed to by the key players.	10. An infrastructure open to experimentation, for e.g. having the organisation assign a full-time person to work with the educational institution on partnership issues.
11. A global education network and capabilities.	12. Commitment to fostering open dialogue and to continually renewing the partnership with fresh thinking.

Since the corporate university focuses on a long-term, strategic approach to learning, qualitative assessments are considered particularly useful in identifying how employees have improved and applied their skills.

This has been referred to as a "patient-capital" mindset in which long-term investments are made into human capital (Training and Development,1998, pp. 41-42).

Finally, in order for the corporate university to function properly information has to be communicated as to its purpose and need. It is important that employees see a link between training and the incorporation of a university system. People must be made aware of the functioning of the university, its governance, and the administering of training programmes, curricula, time frames for learning, other learning partners, the method of funding, and they must be clearly informed about how training will impact on promotion and upward mobility in the organisation (Training and Development, 1998, p. 42).

In the light of this relatively large support for the concept abroad I argued that the South African industry generally, and its airline sector particularly may benefit by implementing a corporate university. Consequently research into experiences and views of the staff of a local airline about training practices was launched, attempting to explore how the 10 steps of the model could be used to create a "Training and Learning Academy" for the company.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Scientific beliefs
In this study my position as to the nature of social phenomena is **social constructionist**, i.e., perceptions of the airline are continually being created by its actors. More specifically, I viewed the reality of the airline as multiple being built up over time through communication, participants' interactions and a shared history. My assumption of the company's staff and stakeholders was voluntaristic, i.e., they actively interact and in order to shape their environment create reality; in this they are not determined by some outside influence(s).

Since I did not believe that the airline could be regarded an objective entity which has a reality external to the consciousness of its actors (to be studied by applying principles and procedures of the natural sciences), I opted for a *qualitative methodology* which respects the differences between objects and people and enables a process through which people's rich subjective meanings can be understood. Such a methodology typically applies participant observation to attain *an insider's view* or knowledge of people's shared meanings but also uses various other unstructured or flexible methods to capture these cultural shared meanings which are forever changing. It also enables a holistic appreciation of a particular social entity, i.e., describing its political, social, economic and cultural context .

Research tradition
The particular variety of qualitative research I used in the study reflected the **modernist tradition** coined by the two esteemed qualitative researchers, Denzin and Lincoln (2000). According to Schurink (2003) the **modernist phase** (from the 1940s to the 1970s) built on the works of the traditional period, social realism and naturalism, and still prevails in recent studies is characterised by interpreting reality by means of formalised qualitative methods and by applying rigorous data analysis (e.g. analytical induction and grounded theory). He, (Schurink (2003) points out that strategies of inquiry range from grounded theory and the case study, to methods of historical, biographical, ethnographic and clinical research.

Research perspective/paradigm
In line with my social constructionist viewpoint within the modernist tradition, I applied the general paradigm of symbolic interactionism as a guide for designing and executing the study. This research paradigm emphasises the diversity of social roles and subcultures, as well as the manner in which participants construct roles and identities through interaction with others (see Schurink, 2003). Thus the staff and stakeholders of the airline industry tended to develop their viewpoints of the nature of their work based on their interactions with each other and other significant people; resulting in "shared behaviours or common definitions". The paradigm also highlights the important concept of "self", a construct not regarded as being situated inside the individual like personality traits, motives and needs (see Schurink, 2004). People view themselves in relation to their interactions with others and how others perceive them.

Research design
I used case study as research strategy/design. According to Zonabend (1992) a case study gives special attention to completeness in observation, reconstruction and analysis of a case or cases under study. In undertaking a case study the views of the "actors" in the case under study are incorporated. Case studies can be particularly useful when researching behavioural and social trends amongst small groups of people or even single individuals. They may be single or multiple-case designs, where a multiple design follows a replication rather than sampling logic (Tellis, 1997). Case studies may also take the form of exploratory studies, explanatory studies and descriptive studies (Yin, 1993; Tellis, 1997).

In the case of exploratory studies, research is normally conducted before the research questions and hypotheses have been defined (Tellis, 1997). They are often done in instances where an area of research is new or uncharted.

Research methodology
Research setting
This research study was undertaken within a large South African airline. There were eight functional departments within this organisation. Each department was responsible for its own training and conducted its training activities independently from the other departments. There were a total of 47 employees who were categorised as trainers or facilitators. In 2004, the training budget for the divisions amounted to R91.8 million.

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF TRAINING COURSES (ADAPTED FROM TRAINING RESEARCH DOCUMENT 2004)

Course Training	Departments (Schools) Conducting
Customer Service Plan	Safety and Service
Customer Service Plan	GPS
Customer Service Plan	Cargo
Customer Service Plan	Voyager
Customer Service Plan	Reservations
Touch Points – Economy Class	Safety and Service
Touch Points – Premium Class	Safety and Service
Customer Service Touch Points	GPS
Cargo Touch Points	Cargo
Touch Points	Voyager
Customer Touch Points	Reservations
Crew Resource Management	Safety and Service
Crew Resource Management	Operations
AxsRes- Check-in staff	GPS
AxsRes (5 days)	Reservations
AxsRes (10 days)	Reservations
Airport Passenger Handling	GPS
Passenger Handling	Reservations
Telephone Technique	GPS
Telephone Etiquette	Reservations
Personal Business Writing	Corporate Development Centre
Business Writing Skills	Reservations
On-job Coaching	Corporate Development Centre
On-job Coaching	Safety and Service

The organisation's systems in training were clearly fragmented and not well linked to its overall strategic plan. More particularly the following core problems were identified: (i) a lack of alignment of training and development to the strategic needs of the company leading to inappropriate and/or a lack of skills, and (ii) waste created in the decentralised training structures resulting in increased costs, duplication, ineffectiveness, differing quality standards and a lack of standard evaluation practices.

The organisation's training structure was contrived according to its specified functional areas. Each functional area had a training unit which operated in isolation of each other in terms of its training and development strategy. Training was executed in a decentralised manner and each of the training units developed its own plans and strategies to train employees.

Academy Schools	
School of leadership	**Commercial School**
• Executive and leadership development	• Specialised product, systems & technical training: GPS, CC, Cargo, Voyager, Reservations, Avmed.
• Management & supervisory development	• Legislative kknowledge
• Coaching and mentoring	• Core competencies:
• Core organisational competencies – customer service, behaviours that reinforce company values and culture, generic competencies, teams	• Customer service
	• Safety & emergency
	• Sales and marketing
	• Call centre skills
	• Aviation medicine
• Supporting EE and diversity	• Passenger loyalty, reward & recognition
• Supporting organisational change	• Common product & systems knowledge
• Bursaries	
• Business and industry knowledge	
• Practitioner development	
School of Flight Operations	**School of Aircraft Maintenance**
• Fleet training	• Apprenticeship training – avionics & mechanical
• Pilot training – conversion & recurrent	• Refresher training
• Cadet training	• Focus is on engine maintenance, avionics and interface
• Safety and emergency procedures	• 3rd party systems, programmes & licensing
• Legislative kknowledge	• Safety and emergency procedures
• Aviation authority compliance	• Knowledge of regulations and llegislation
• OCC training	

Figure 2: Training Structure of the South African airline firm (*Adapted from Training and Research Document, 2004*)

The Operations Division was divided into the following areas: (i) safety and service; (ii) operations training; (iii) airline control training; (iv) pilot training/ simulator, and (v) global passenger services (GPS) (Training and Research Document, 2004.)

An assessment of current training practices was undertaken and the following were highlighted: (i) training is not strategic or transformative, i.e. it is too rooted in the status quo; there is too little consideration of how training will support business improvement and transformation; (ii) training across schools does not support organisational change; (iii) training is dispersed and fragmented; (iv) there is limited coordination, steering and learning across schools, which results in large quality variations, duplication and waste, and limited cross learning and assimilation of best practice; (v) these problems are evident in relation to planning, designing, scheduling, procuring, managing, quality assuring and evaluating training; (vi) much training is school (versus demand) driven, which coincides with the somewhat limited ad hoc involvement in most schools; (vii) learning and development is not integrated with the Human Resource strategy and systems (Resolve Group Presentation, 2004).

As an employee of the organization at the time, at senior-management level, I had the opportunity to interact with "gatekeepers" and to reach an agreement with key figureheads to undertake the study. Prior to the commencement of the fieldwork I contacted the Head of the Training Division in which I work, as it was vital to gain permission and support for the study. In a meeting with the training department head, I discussed the nature of what I intended to research and the relevance of the study to my particular division. This was important as research involving corporate universities was presented to the organization a few months earlier by the Resolve Group. This allowed for 'buy-in' into the concept as the Resolve Group research highlighted serious problems in training and my research could potentially provide a solution(s) to those problems. My research was an extension of the Resolve Group findings and has strategic implications for the firm. As a result I received the approval of the Training head. My department head then suggested that I start highlighting who would be appropriate subjects for the research and made some suggestions as well as directing me to the Human Resources division to obtain further information. After liaising with the Human Resources division, I was able to draw up a list of potential participants. Thereafter, initial contacts were made telephonically and appointments were set with these potential participants for face-to-face interviews prior to the commencement of the focus group.

Sampling data sources
The research participants chosen for the study were selected from a cross section of employees in the Johannesburg office. The reasons for selecting Johannesburg as location were two-fold. Firstly, the Johannesburg office was considered the Head Office and secondly, the Johannesburg region provided me with a convenient location in order to conduct the focus group discussions as I reside in the area.

As was pointed out the airline organisation had a complex organisational structure; necessitating including managers at executive level, senior manager level and middle management level in the study. I applied theoretical sampling to identify key managers to take part in the study. More specifically, I selected research participants from both managerial and non-managerial backgrounds.

The non-managerial employees were selected on the basis that they were employee representatives. There were a large number of managers and this presented some difficulty in securing a suitable sample. As pointed out earlier 47 employees are trainers or facilitators. The Human Resource department was also contacted, to check if these were the key managers and non-

management employees to interview. Table 4, provides an outline of the research participants involved in the focus group discussion.

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Respondent	Position
1.	Executive Vice President-Operations
2.	Vice President-Customer Services
3.	Executive Manager-Training
4.	Senior Manager
5.	Senior Manager
6.	Senior Manager
7.	Middle Manager
8.	Middle Manager
9.	Non-managerial Employee
10.	Non-managerial Employee

Various methods are available when one conducts a qualitative study. I now outline those I used in the study.

Unstructured interviews
Interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful methods used when one strives towards understanding human beings (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Interviews are commonly used within qualitative research studies. When I made the initial contacts with the research participants, it was deemed appropriate to utilise unstructured interviews in order to obtain a more open-ended approach with the interviewees. This method allowed for easier communication and interaction between the interviewees and me.

I briefed the interviewees as to the purpose of the study and took care not to highlight the corporate university concept. This was important as I did not want participants searching out information prior to the focus group session as their views and experiences might be affected. It was highlighted that training and development was the topic under investigation and that I wanted to review their thoughts and experiences. These initial interviews only involved brief note taking, as the concern was more in getting consent and participation from the interviewees. Some of the information obtained during this phase was then used to develop the schedule for the focus group discussion, particularly questions that related to general training.

Human Documents
Documents are also a valuable source for information and I used documents of the company such as internal training manuals and training policy documents.

Participant observation
In participant observation, the researcher is typically engaged in experiencing the research setting while at the same time trying to understand it through personal experience, observations, and interactions and discussions with participants (see Schurink, 2003a). Participant observation can take place with the observer taking on different roles. These roles include, full participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and full-fledged observer (see Schurink, 2003a). In addition, participant observation may be covert or overt. For example, a researcher may opt being overt, that is being transparent by informing his or her research participants about the study. My familiarity with the research participants and strong involvement within the training division enabled me to act overtly as participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant.

Finally, I used focus groups as it combines the advantages of both observation and face-to-face interviews.

Focus groups
Kreuger (1994) as well as Coldwell and Herbst (2004) express the advantages of focus groups as the ability to quickly and reliably get common impressions, an efficient way to get much range and depth of information in a short period of time, and lastly, being useful in conveying key information about programmes. Coldwell and Herbst (2004) explain that the challenges of focus groups lie in them being tough to analyse peoples' viewpoints, the difficulty to find a good facilitator, and the scheduling of the focus group at a time suitable for the research participants.

I planned the focus group session for a time and venue suitable to all participants. I also developed a focus group schedule to ensure that certain issues were covered during the discussion. Hence, the discussion was based on a semi-structured format to facilitate both discussion and structure.

It took four weeks to make initial and subsequent contacts with research participants and to organise the focus group session. The interviews involved 10 participants; it was conducted in a comfortable and relaxed manner, and lasted approximately 2 hours.

It was necessary to provide a definition of a corporate university used in the discussion. In line with the definition espoused by Gould (2005, p. 508) I defined focus groups as "a formal system of training that exists within a company...The university provides training initiatives that is based on company needs and individual needs...this is not a typical training department...instead, the focus is on continuous learning...the corporate university is an integral part of the organisation and it plays a strategic role in the organisation" (Focus group discussions, 2005).

I ensured to the best of my ability that patterns in the experiences and perspectives of the research participants were uncovered as well as similarities in opinions that the research participants shared. However, I was also looking out for "deviant" or "negative cases".

Transcribed taped focus group session
The focus group session was taped and was later transcribed. Thereafter, I grouped further notes based on the entire transcribed session according to four categories, namely, executive management, senior management, middle management and non-managerial employee to review differences and similarities of the opinions of the research participants at various management levels. The transcriptions were considered to be a true reflection of the discussion that ensued and was stored as hard-copy.

Field Notes
I captured the data by writing field notes during the initial individuals interview sessions and the focus group session. This enabled me to identify areas of agreement between the research participants and any differing opinions that emerged during the focus group discussion. The field notes were compiled utilising the typology suggested by Schurink (2003b) and included observational notes (notes on what happened with little, if any interpretation provided); theoretical notes (self-conscious, systematic attempts to derive meanings from the observational notes) and methodological notes.

These notes also ensured that there was consistency in information provided by the transcriptions and the field notes.

Data analysis
I obtained valuable and varied data from the research participants' experiences and views regarding training in the company and the application of the corporate university. I managed the data procedurally according to the format

presented by Schurink (2003c), i.e., **firstly**, I recorded the data, **secondly**, I categorised them according to themes and topics; **thirdly**, I assessed patterns of understandings and **finally**, I linked these themes to the airline industry. The main themes identified were general viewpoints and opinions about the corporate university. I systemised all the data manually. More specifically I worked through the field notes and the transcriptions of the focus group and categorised the position of the interviewees in the organisation, their general understanding of training, their knowledge and views of the corporate university and their willingness to participate in the focus group.

FINDINGS

Due to the complexity of the organisational structure, particularly at management level, I now present the findings by splitting the research participants' into 4 categories, namely, executive management, senior management middle management and non-managerial employees.

Executive management
Executive Management included Executive Vice President-Operations, Vice President-Customer Services and Executive Manager-Training. These managers were primarily responsible for strategic decision-making within their functions at board level. It was apparent from the discussion that all three executives shared similar viewpoints of training in general. Training was described as being a critical and strategic function that aims to develop and up skill workers. Other views were:
- Training serves to improve the effectiveness of individuals by the work that they deliver...Training is important to the organisation as it drives a learning culture.
- Training is a critical and strategic function to the organisation ... it enables all employees to perform their jobs more effectively.
- Training is meant to up skill and develop all employees...it is critical to an organisation's sustainability.

Training is offered to both managerial and non-managerial staff. The general consensus in this group was that employees should be chosen for training on the basis of performance measures as well as developmental needs. It was also suggested that employees and their respective managers should be involved in determining training needs. It is interesting to note that at this level, all three managers felt that training was done on an ad hoc basis with no specific company and policy guidelines in place.

In addition, training was perceived to be highly fragmented and reactive with no specific link been made to the overall strategic goals of the organisation. Some of the responses included:
- Employees are chosen for training in a reactive way...it is based purely on numbers for training as opposed to purpose for training.
- Employees should be chosen for training based on developmental needs or the performance management system as this should provide information towards existing shortcomings.

In terms of the corporate university concept, all managers at this level had heard of it. Two felt it related to best practices in terms of learning and development.

An interesting finding at executive level was that the Executive Vice President-Operations understood the corporate university concept as applicable to management employees only; it was perceived as a useful tool to sustain long-term learning and development. The following were representative comments:
- My understanding of this approach would seem pertinent or relevant to management employees...My understanding of this term would be to have an integrated strategic training

and development focus on specified areas of training such as technical, leadership, pilot training and cabin-crew training.
- The corporate university concept or approach is a good one as it emphasises an alignment of training and development functions within organisations.

There was general consensus that the concept needed to have "buy-in" and that employees need to be made aware of the purpose and intent of the corporate university.

The following reflected typical views here:
- Yes, all employees must understand the strategy, the process and deliverables of such an approach in order for the concept to work.
- If marketed and communicated properly, it will be well received.

In essence, the executive level supported the idea of the corporate university and as one executive aptly suggested:
- Corporate universities should be able to develop core organisational competencies to promote people performance, service excellence, customer and employee satisfaction and employer status ... it should be run by a chief learning officer where all training and development resides.

Senior Management
Senior management were tactical within their specific functions and were not represented at board level. Within this category, views about training in general were quite similar. All three senior managers felt that training carried with it, a need to develop employees and link them to the organisation's overall strategic plan. Training was provided in-house for both managerial and non-managerial employees. The general view was that performance measures were critical in ascertaining training needs. Senior management also felt that due consideration must be given to the employees' development plan.
- Development. Yes, it is important to the organisation ... however we are working with our corporate training department that seem to be providing training with fragmented skills.
- Training is vital if you want to compete as a world class organisation ... as long as there is no links to business objectives training will remain disjointed or irrelevant.

Unlike the executive level, the senior managers in this focus group felt that the immediate managers or supervisors in the department should manage the selection of employees for training.
- It is important for employees to have some input into their training needs however the final decision should rest with the actual managers involved.
- Immediate supervisors should make recommendations to the executive according to legislative guidelines and company policy.

This emphasises little interaction between the employees themselves and management as to what training is required. Senior management felt that the current training system was not clearly linked to departmental and organisational goals.
- No, as a financial person my needs are not really taken care off ... furthermore finance skills levels are very low amongst employees and more focussed training should be given to targeted individuals.
- The Human Resources department needs more training than others ... there are always complaints on human resource processes and staff are not aware of legislative changes and updates that affects human resource policies and procedures.

The word "fragmented" was used to describe the current approach to training. Senior managers also highlighted an important issue of training being irrelevant for a staff member or department.

Some comments in this regard were:
- Training does not follow a structured approach with no real thought being given to the process
- Training is not planned and occurs on a ad hoc basis and is not linked to the department's objectives or company goals ... it is highly fragmented.

In terms of the corporate university concept, only one senior manager had heard of the term. The other two had to be given further information in order to ascertain their opinions about applying the corporate university concept to their organisation. Senior managers felt that it would work well if its purposes were communicated clearly.

As one senior manager remarked:
- The return on investment on such an initiative must be shared by all.

The senior management group showed a positive response to the concept provided that there is structured coaching and mentoring systems in place to support learning and development.

Middle Management

Middle management had an operation focus and refers to those managers that reported to senior management. Managers at this level were in constant and direct contact with other employees. As these managers had good knowledge at a functional level as well as knowledge that were employee relevant they provided an important link between employees and senior management. It was apparent from the discussion that not many discrepancies existed between the middle management research participants.

The interviewees all agreed on the general purpose for training and development, namely to provide knowledge and improve business performance.
- Training should be targeted at employees on a continuous basis to ensure that learning becomes a vital aspect of their presence in a department.
- Effective training, leads to more effective performance from the employee, however, the benefits extend to the organisation as a whole because this translates into better business performance.

Middle management felt that training should be job specific, based on the requirements of individuals to perform more efficiently at their job. Two participants commented:
- Training does not seem appropriate, as there is no structure or process in place ... people go for training because they are told to.
- Training should be job specific but also tie in with the needs of the individual.

It was expressed that the final decision as to the kind of training that should be provided and who should be trained should lie in the hands of the manager. Middle management participants felt that their needs to be more structure in educating staff as to the guidelines of the training available, the selection process and criteria.
- Managers should be responsible for selecting trainees, however the ad hoc basis by which it is done is ineffective ... also there is limited forums and discussion about training policy.
- I have not heard or seen anything about the policy ... infact, all I know about is a bursary process.

Middle management participants appeared to be unaware of the training processes and could not decide where training should be directed and what type of training was needed. With regard to corporate university, they never heard of the term. They seemed to caution against long term structured training, simply

due to the ever-increasing changes within the industry. The group also felt that it would be a good idea although it would have to be explained properly and reviewed continuously to keep up with trends. Finally they felt that this type of training should improve performance drastically and should lead to a noticeable change in trained employees. Two participants put it as follows:
- I have not heard of a corporate university, only what you have told me ... if it is explained clearly it could be a vehicle to promote focussed training and development.
- The concept is a useful one, especially for front-line staff that requires specific training.

Employee-Non-Managerial

Non-managerial staff including employees such as cabin crewmembers and administrators was selected because they represented employees. They expressed similar sentiments towards training and its purpose within the organisation and felt that it would provide knowledge and learning, which would aid in developing staff. Comments included:
- Training helps to develop people within their current jobs.
- Training makes employees more knowledgeable as they are involved in a process of learning.

The participants felt that the selection of training should lie with the managers; although one expressed the view that non-managerial staff should not be ignored and only managerial staff be sent for training. The following excerpts were particularly striking:
- I am not sure about problems in training, but I do think that supervisors need to have more training.
- The technical department requires more training, especially those in non-managerial positions.

They also showed no knowledge of the training process and structure that exist within the organisation. They felt that training should be directed to hands on staff members, especially those who interact with customers.
- I have no idea about training policy ... I don't think I have seen anything ... but it is important that the people to whom we report directly have relationships with us and also train us.
- Training is not done properly...you are told on the day to go for training ... there is a feeling of confusion as we are not really in touch with the people that train us ... we are not quite sure who they are and they don't seem to understand what we need.

With regard to the corporate university, none of the participants in Non-managerial staff category were aware of the term. They believed it to be a good idea, but stressed the need that explanation and some education about the structure and process needed to be directed at all staff to ensure its success. Comments included:
- It will be good ... it can help employees but senior managers must tell us what it is about and the benefits of it.
- I think it can help in learning better things about the airline industry but everyone needs to understand it first.

Non-managerial staff easily rationalised the improvement of training and development the corporate university should bring about, but stressed the need for education and explanation of the process and that selection criteria need to be developed for all levels of staff.

It was believed:
- It will help to improve skills and develop workers, but people have to know what it is about.
- If people can get to go for training and understand the training, they can perform better.

DISCUSSION

The corporate university model provided the impetus to launch the 'Training and Learning Academy'. Within this Academy, all training activities would fall under a single structure. This would allow for the centralisation of training activities, which could assist alleviating disjointed training taking place at various functional areas in the organisation. This supported the views of the participants with regard to their believing that training was fragmented. Created with specific governing procedures and structures the Academy would infuse a philosophy of learning and development understood by all employees.

The major benefit of centralised learning is the cost savings that result from standardisation, central reporting, record keeping and quality control (Ellis & Mauldin, 2002). It is also suggested by these scholars that the main benefits of decentralised learning relates to the large amount of people that can be trained within a variety of areas.

What is apparent here is that both approaches have significant benefits. Hence, I believe that the merits of both approaches can be used within the corporate university setting. Support for the "Hybrid Model" is evidenced in the work of Ellis and Mauldin (2002) who contend that the best model is one that captures the strengths of both models while effectively managing the relationship between corporates and local training functions.

This model can be implemented successfully if there are sufficient resources and a commonality in the training objectives of employees in the organisation. This illustrates a link with the second problem identified namely, waste created in the decentralised training structures resulting in increased costs, duplication, ineffectiveness, different quality standards and a lack of standard evaluation practices.

"Centralised versus decentralised learning? The most effective enterprise learning management and human capital development system is the right combination of both" (Ellis & Mauldin, 2002). Hence, the combination of a centralised and decentralised system needs to be incorporated within the corporate university. I already alluded to the fragmented and highly decentralised approach to training and development of the airline industry. At this stage it is vital to centralise certain key strategic elements (overall learning philosophy, governance, core curriculum design and development, policies and procedure regarding registration, administration, measurement, marketing and distance learning) and decentralise other activities such as site of delivery (Training and Development, 1998, p.40).

Since the focus of a corporate university is not only short-term, the Academy can focus on continuous education and training. This would benefit both the employee and the organisation because training is more focussed, relevant and all employees are eligible for training. This is especially important as the research findings suggested that an ad hoc approach was largely used for training with no specific link to the organisation's overall goals.

The Academy could also provide opportunities for learning at higher levels of management. Since such individuals would typically seek out training from a formalised education institution the Academy could assist in providing such opportunities within the organisational structure. Non-managerial employees did suggest that problems in training were found at the managerial level. This is an interesting viewpoint and reiterates the importance of training at all levels within the organisation.

The Academy could provide the basis for identifying training gaps and could therefore review current trends to best inform as to what type of training and learning would be beneficial to employees. Incorporating the Academy would illustrate a commitment to the company's greatest assets, its people. It could fulfil a more proactive role and could become a major differentiating factor. The strategic focus of training initiatives accompanying the implementation of the model could bring about cost savings of up to R7 million. This could establish a link between strategic training policy and the need to become competitive that was not perceived by the research participants.

The Academy normally sets in place a continuous training and learning imperative that could benefit the organisation immensely. The research findings indicated a rather non-targeted approach to training, where managers simply select people for training.

The corporate university model being implemented through the development of the Academy may be met with some objections. This is not unusual where change is being implied. Employees and management may not readily "buy-in" to the concept, and may view the Academy as 'judging their performance on the ability to participate in learning, as opposed to (in part) their present skills. The merits of such an entity might be questioned and management might be concerned particularly about the kinds of decision-making power that the Academy would enjoy

Also, a concern could be raised about how resources may be allocated to the Academy. These are pertinent issues, but provided the Academy is created with proper governance, policies and structures, negative connotations associated with it such as a lack of buy-in and distrust of the Academy's purpose, should be largely removed. The Academy should work if all its functions are integrated. This does not imply that training is the same for everybody but that its diverse divisions need to fall under a centralised structure that is well structured and co-ordinated.

The Academy can facilitate linkages with other stakeholders such as universities which, could in turn, assist in the development of training and learning programmes. For example, the Academy can provide on-site training and link its programmes to specific standards set out by the South African Qualifications Association and the National Qualifications Framework. The Academy's "graduates" could be considered for career advancement, which would show a link between training and development for employees. The Academy would not be a training division; but instead a formal structure playing a strategic role in the learning and development of employees. Derived from the internal
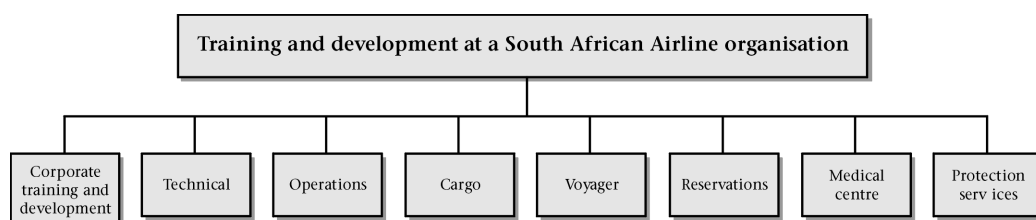
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│  Training and development at a South African Airline organisation │
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| Corporate training and development | Technical | Operations | Cargo | Voyager | Reservations | Medical centre | Protection services |

Figure 3: The 'Training and Learning Academy' schools

investigation by the Resolve Group (2004) the Airline could then have the Academy structured around 4 key areas including: a School of Leadership, A Commercial School, a School of Flight Operations and a School of Aircraft Maintenance. These schools are indicated in Figure 3.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative-explorative study utilised focus groups, participant observation and documents to obtain information about training and the corporate university concept first hand from employees in a local Airline.

I did my best from the outset to cover quality considerations in the design and execution of the study. More particularly, I ensured as far as possible "soundness" by achieving authenticity, credibility, triangulation and member validation (Schurink 2005; Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002). Authenticity was considered as an important factor and in order to achieve this, field notes were taken during the interview sessions as well as the focus group session. In addition, the focus group session was recorded and transcribed. Credibility was achieved through establishing vital contacts with various department heads and liaison with the human resources division.

Various methods of data collection (triangulation) was used to lend greater credibility and authenticity to the data being collected. Finally, member validation was achieved by providing the research participants with focus group session findings to check for correctness and whether it was a true reflection of the discussion.

Although I believe that the research findings are of pretty good quality, no social science research is infallible (see Mouton & Marais 1990). This most certainly applied to the present study. One of the major shortcomings of this research is that it included a single focus group discussion amongst a few employees.

Regardless of these shortcomings the findings and insights I obtained not only have implications for academia but also for practice and policy. Adopting a social constructionist viewpoint revealing and describing employees' everyday subjective experiences provided scientific building blocks of their constructions shaped by their interactions with colleagues and others enabling them to attach meaning to their situation and the applicability of the academic university in the Airways where they worked. This is particularly important since it adds to the current literature within the Human Resources, the Industrial Psychology and the Leadership fields and presents the opportunity for further empirically driven work in this area.

Methodologically, by encasing the study in a qualitative research style which is still not regarded the mainstream research style locally its contributions in this particular study area is illustrated.

Regarding **practice** and **policy**, the employees' views of a 'new' training paradigm provided greater insight into management and employee perceptions of training. Corporates can strategically change training by the creation of a physical structure and entity that would result in continuous training and learning. The corporate university model carries with it a significant amount of advantage in terms of training and development. The academy build on the corporate university model not only proposes a proactive approach for this airline but could contribute tying in both strategic imperatives and individual needs.

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