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Investigating Work Integrated Learning for Employability

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A Case Study from the Automotive Industry

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ABSTRACT

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) has been shown to improve graduate learners employability (Brauns 2013, p. 11; Moletsane 2012, p. 9; Jonck 2014, pp. 286-287). This study traced the experiences of 15 learners and that of their workplace managers in two large corporates within the automotive industry, to understand how WIL improved their employability and what role the workplace played in this regard. The study is a cross disciplinary one, in that it combines an education perspective as well as a business practice perspective. This study shows that WIL offers the workplace the opportunity to start understanding its own in situ learning practice. By building a perspective on how the WIL programme is implemented in a workplace, it has been possible to reframe work integrated learning from the employer's perspective and develop an alternative approach to facilitating learning partnerships in the workplace.

REPORT PREPARED BY

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SUMMARY

INVESTIGATING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

The purpose of this study is to understand, against the backdrop of massive youth unemployment, the interplay between work and learning. Firstly, to examine the workplace as a learning environment which supports the development of skills and attributes that will enhance the employability of young new entrants to the workplace; and, secondly to investigate the readiness of the workplace to implement work integrated learning programmes. The reason for the focus on the workplace is that I believe we do not fully understand the potential of workplace-based learning as a vehicle for learning and building employability skills.

The study used a qualitative exploratory research approach adopting a case study methodology to answer the "*how*" (process) and "*why*" (motivation) questions surrounding workplace learning. Data from a variety of sources such as interviews, questionnaires, company profiles and visual representations were used. Data was encoded and analysed to identify themes in line with the research questions of the study in order to illuminate the case.

The case study is located at two large corporate companies within the automotive industry with learners placed at nine worksites mainly in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality of Gauteng In order to study the workplace learning component, a WIL project using the National Certificate: Youth Development Learnership was presented to twenty unemployed HR graduates. The graduates were being trained to fill a gap identified by the employers with regard to the administration and support of skills development within the Human Resources units of the companies. The qualified youth development practitioner would specialise in handling major issues with regard to recruitment, placement, progress and support of interns and apprentices for the company. By studying the dynamics within the project, it was possible to observe how learners, managers, mentors and teams interact in the organisations to build capacity. Specifically, the objective of the research study was to identify the contribution of the workplace to enhancing the employability of the cohort of learners that participated in the project.

Finally, although limited by time (the programme being delivered over one year) and attrition (where five learners resigned from the programme), the project took pains at developing accurate, reliable and trustworthy information about the events and results observed in the project. Care was also taken to develop rich information which would allow the reader to connect to the case under review and understand the social dynamics involved in the study.

The theoretical basis guiding the study examined the academic discourse on youth employability. I provide a review of the policy thrust that addresses youth unemployment in South Africa and then survey the assertions made by previous authors on theories in the field of work integrated learning. The literature review identified that previous studies offered limited perspectives on coordinated learning in the workplace and it became necessary to develop a cross disciplinary understanding of what was happening. Currently WIL is largely debated from an educational perspective while organisational learning forms part of a critical review of business practices. I was able to combine the education discipline with organisational learning to create a more complete understanding of WIL in practice.

Work integrated learning encompasses a collection of approaches and strategies in which structured classroom education and training is co-mingled with work experience to achieve the outcomes of a particular curriculum. However, in this study work integrated learning explored: learning about the task at hand; the learner learning about themselves, their own motivation and drive; and learning how to be at work. Each worksite is unique and therefore provides a unique WIL experience – because tasks, teams and goals differ from site to site. The literature on organisational learning confirms that not all work experience is the same since it is approached, supported and evaluated differently. Similarly, ETD providers are using WIL to align themselves more closely with the workplace/industry thereby creating a differentiated course offering which is attractive to prospective students. Building on this understanding, it becomes clear that what is needed for WIL to be of equal benefit for all partners, is a coordinated and collaborative approach in managing and delivering the WIL programme.

From the study, it was possible to group the approaches adopted by managers into three classes:

- A structured approach - in which they evaluated their worksites and the requirements of the programme to assess what experiences they could afford the learners and what support they could provide,

- An unstructured but managed approach, which I have called “going with the flow” – in which the primary objective seems to be to integrate the learner into the workplace and less emphasis is placed on the programme, or
- Leaving it to the learner, an unstructured and unmanaged approach where all activities are driven by the learner taking initiative and building their own support networks.

The structured approach creates a supportive learning environment which learners respond to. It also seems to provide more predictable results in terms of the project outcomes but this cannot be confirmed by this study alone. The other approaches are more dependent on an individual manager, team member or learner taking the lead and pushing through organisational barriers to build new networks and create learning opportunities required by the WIL programme.

The study also identified some inhibiting factors that slowed learning in the workplace, and in some cases even brought it to a complete standstill these included:

0 Differing expectations with respect to outcomes, practice and performance;
1 A lack of or limited communication with respect to requirements or plans;
2 Isolating punitive management practices in which learners felt they could not meet the standards expected and eventually stopped engaging with the workplace;
3 Learners never really being integrated into the team, based on initial conflict scenarios in which the resolution was not to their liking; and
4 Pregnancy limiting the learners’ participation in the workplace and this having an impact on their eventual employability.

In addition, the study highlights that most of the sites showed the potential to develop a learning culture or a culture more supportive of learning. However, when learners are initially placed at the worksite, workplace managers needed to consciously focus on supporting learning and that their default practices were still performance oriented.

Finally, almost all learners felt that the programme enhanced their employability. Eight of the fifteen learners who completed the programme were employed by the end of the project.

A structured approach is recommended because in that way completeness, support and more controllable outcomes are ensured. The recommendations go on to challenge a number of unspoken assumptions around WIL:

1. That organisations will communicate the objectives and directions necessary for implementation to all levels and divisions involved;
2. That organisations have the capacity to support WIL; and
3. That learners and managers will be prepared for a WIL partnership without additional preparation for the specific types of social interactions they may face.

To address these fully it is recommended that the preparation of learners and managers is part of every WIL programme. The core of my recommendations focuses on securing the agreement of the organisation around a practical implementation plan of the WIL project at multiple levels, ensuring that the implementation links to actual work practices and schedules, where outcomes are agreed and managed jointly by both the training provider and the workplace. Building this initial agreement is further supported by ongoing contact and feedback to ensure that the partners in the WIL programme remain in synch regarding the outcomes of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is based on the work done as part of my Doctoral Research for a Doctorate in Management and Innovation at the Da Vinci Institute. I would like to thank the following people and companies for their support, encouragement and input in completing the research and this report:

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- Lorretta Barbour for all her assistance throughout the project, with a special thanks for the graphics presented here. This journey would not have been possible without her,
- My Family, for your support and long-suffering patience in enduring the absences required for conducting and writing this research – I will never be able to say thank you enough.

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LIST OF ACCRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CCFO	Critical Cross Field Outcome
COSATU	Congress of the South African Trade Unions
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIW	Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, The German Institute for Economic Research
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
ETD	Education Training and Development
FET	Further Education and Training
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Policy
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resources Management
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information Technology
LUMAS	Learning for a User by a Methodology-informed Approach to a Situation
MERSETA	Manufacturing Engineering Related Sector Education and Training Authority
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NPC	National Planning Commission
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority

NSDS III	National Skills Development Strategy III
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SABPP	South African Board of People Professions
SAPA	South African Press Association
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SDA	Skills Development Act
SSACI	Swiss South African Cooperation Initiative
SSM	Soft Systems Methodology
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organizations
WBE	Work Based Experience
WEF	World Economic Forum
WIL	Work Integrated Learning
YDP	Youth Development Practitioner

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1 INTRODUCTION

Youth in South Africa today are confronted with the struggle of accessing education, choosing the right education and finding employment. Against the background of growing structural unemployment, which impacts the youth the hardest of all, this study was initiated to explore constructively what steps could be taken, in a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Project, to help the youth to improve their odds of finding work? Specifically, the study investigates the contribution of the workplace in shaping the employability of unemployed youth through a work integrated learning (WIL) intervention, based on the Learnership model.

The objective of this study was to understand, against the backdrop of massive youth unemployment, the interplay between work and learning, firstly to examine the workplace as a learning environment which supports the development of skills and attributes that will enhance the employability of young new entrants to the workplace; secondly to investigate the readiness of the workplace to implement work integrated learning programmes.

This report is based on the study conducted as part of a Doctorate in Management and Innovation, registered with the Da Vinci Institute, and sponsored by the Imperial Group through MERSETA funding.

1.1 Structure of the Report

The structure of the report closely mirrors that of an academic report into the following sections:

- Introduction – Introducing the study, establishing that the study aims to explore a WIL project to find practical ways of helping companies implement WIL but also to establish ways of helping the unemployed youth;
- Conceptual Framework – drawing in the focus to create a clear boundary and roadmap for the study;
- Methodology – a summary of the study design, participants, research and analysis techniques used;
- Findings – the data collected from the study and its implications;

- Conclusions – what I learnt from the study;
- Recommendations – what the learning from the study means for future practice and policy.

1.2 Unemployment in South Africa

The stark reality for South Africa is that we suffer from a high, structural unemployment. The latest Labour Force Survey from Statistics South Africa highlights this. 5.2 million people in South African are unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. xii), of which 1.5 million have been unemployed for longer than 5 years and 1.2 million have been unemployed between 1-3 years (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. xvi), and 1.95 million are new entrants to the job market (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. 41) – that is they have never been employed before, and represent the cumulative number of people who have unsuccessfully entered the job market in South Africa.

1.3 Youth Unemployment

Youth Unemployment is a global crisis

It is important to note that this is a crisis that all countries in the world are grappling with. Although the recent economic crisis has once again thrust youth unemployment *"in the spotlight"* (ILO 2012, p. 4), the conversation and concern started much earlier. Hess, et al. (1994, p. 4) report the US government having raised this as an issue as early as 1960 and Groener (2014, p. 731) reflects that even in South Africa the issue was already part of the political debate in 1970. However, it has now reached epidemic proportions, affecting all regions in the world (ILO 2013, pp. 8,9).

1.3.1 Scope of the Problem

The reality is that the youth make up a significant portion of the worlds unemployed, 42.3% of the world's unemployed (ILO 2013, p. 3), with a global 13% youth unemployment rate consistently rising at about 0.2% every two years (Kapsos 2014, p. 12). This continued expansion of youth unemployment is an important global issue to address.

Emerging markets face the greatest challenge of youth unemployment

The emerging economies face the greatest challenge with an average youth employment growth rate of -1.5% from 1991-2013 (Mahmood et

al. 2014, p. 34), with young women in Sub-Saharan Africa being the most vulnerable (Mahmood et al. 2014, p. 9).

In South Africa students even struggle to find work experience

In South Africa the youth make up 71% of the unemployed population, there are 3.2 million of the 10.4 million youth aged between 15 – 24 year who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) which means that 31.4% youth are NEET (Statistics South Africa 2014). In addition the National Planning Committee (NPC) (National Development Plan 2030 - 2012, p. 320) claims that 65% of college students in South Africa are unable to find the work experience necessary to complete their training, and this does not even include finding jobs.

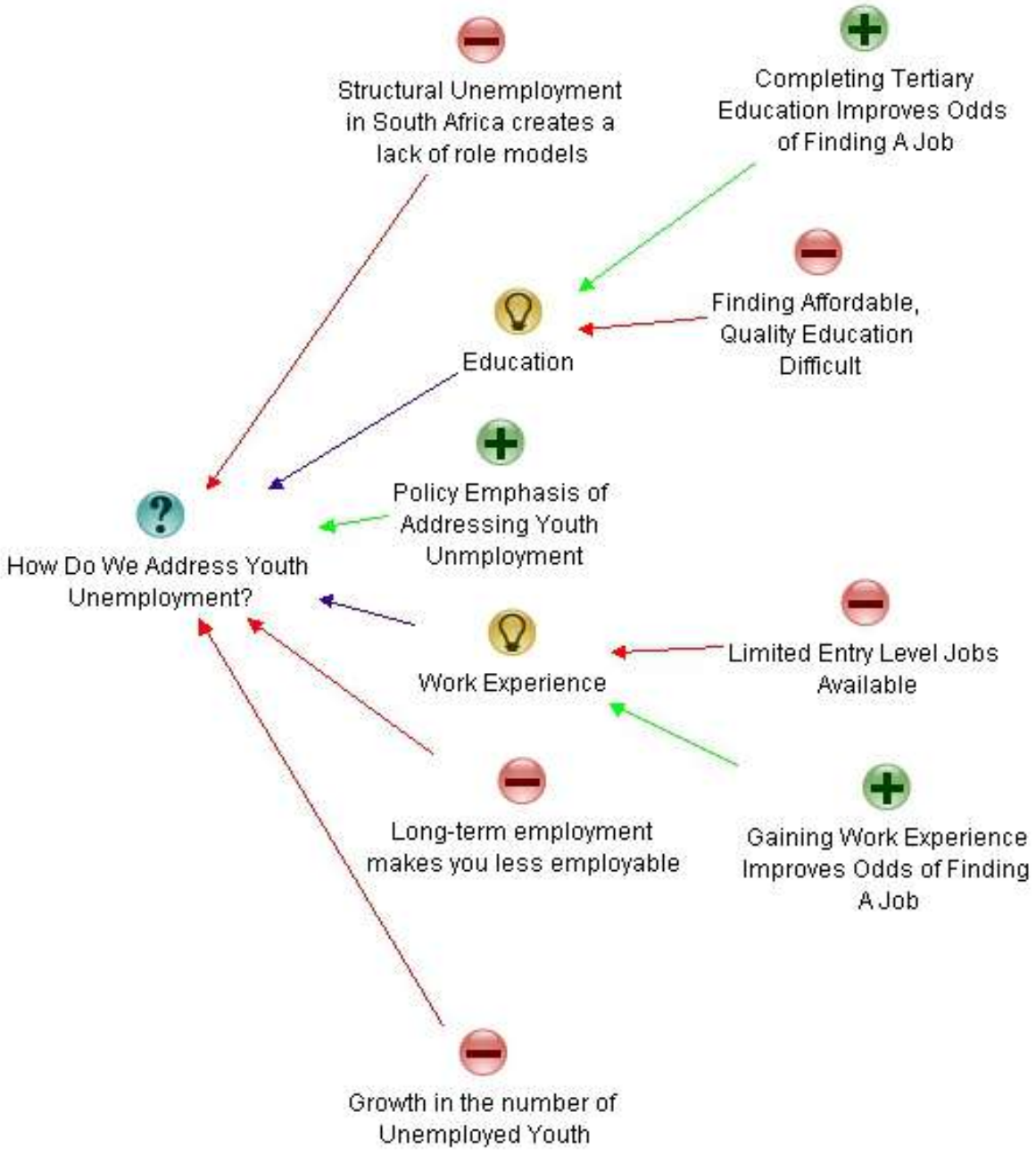
Austria, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland are able to keep youth unemployment below 10% (ILO 2012)

Mainly due to more favourable business markets and a smaller population of young people

Six countries in the developed world have been able to keep the youth unemployment rate below 10%: Austria, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland (ILO 2012). Although various authors (Neumann 2012; de Lange, Gesthuizen & Wolbers 2014; Breen 2005; Wolbers 2007) identify a number of factors that contribute to the lower youth unemployment, the core reasons are linked to more favourable business markets (the number of jobs available is higher) (de Lange, Gesthuizen & Wolbers 2014, p. 208) and a demographic swing, that is because there are less young people in the population group there are less young people looking for a job (Brenke 2013).

Figure 1: Illustrates the youth unemployment dialogue that is necessary to begin addressing the problem of both finding jobs as well as finding work experience for the youth.

FIGURE 1: THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT DIALOGUE



1.3.2 The Root of the Problem

The key reasons for youth unemployment cited by different researchers are:

- **Demographics** (ILO 2013, p. 7; Mahmood et al. 2014, p. 33) – the increased number of young people that need to be absorbed into the workplace. Particularly in the developing world resulting in what Ali (2014, p. 13) calls the *"youth bulge"*;
- The **Job Market** (Mahmood et al. 2014, p. 38) – the potential for the economy or business market to absorb more people;
- **School-to-Work transition** structures and processes – how it is regulated, organised (de Lange, Gesthuizen & Wolbers 2014, pp. 200-202; Wolbers 2007, p. 205); and
- **Education mismatch** (ILO 2012, p. 24) – the gap between what people are being trained on and the skills employers need.

The two controllable factors, prominently linked to sustained unemployment are education and work experience. Holding a tertiary qualification will improve your odds of being employed by 1.7 times over obtaining a Matric, and 2.1-2.7 times if you had not completed school (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. vii). Where having work experience means it is 2.7 times more likely for you to get a job school (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. xix).

> *"When you don't work you lose skills and you lose capacity to perform, and then you become less employable."*
>
> Pali Lehohla (SAPA 2014)

The unemployment rate for young people, 15-34 year olds, is more than twice that amongst 35-64 year olds and does not show any signs of becoming less critical any time soon.

In 2012, 377 847 matriculants passed their National Senior Certificate (NSC)

Unemployment in South Africa

- 5.2 million people unemployed
- 1.95 million are new entrants to the job market

Completing a tertiary qualification improves your odds of getting a job by up to 2.7 times.

Having work experience means you are 2.7 times more likely to get a job.

- Unemployment rate for 15-34 year olds 67.3%
- Unemployment rate for 35-64 year olds 32.5%

(Statistics South Africa 2014)

Youth & Education in South Africa

- 356 000 matriculants pass annually

(Department of Basic Education 2014; Council for Higher Education 2013)

New Jobs

- 116 000 new jobs created annually

(Statistics South Africa 2014)

(Department of Basic Education 2014, p. 24) which is slightly higher than the average number of 356000 scholars obtaining a National Senior Certificate annually since 2005. Of which only 200000 are being enrolled at higher education institutes (Council for Higher Education 2013, p. 63) and 55% of first year students not expecting to complete their qualifications (Council for Higher Education 2013, p. 15).

In addition, on average only 116 000 new jobs have been created annually, from 2010 to 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. 9). This means there is an annual addition of more than 150 000 to the ranks of the unemployed youth in South Africa. So it becomes ever more challenging for young South Africans to find education and workplace opportunities that will move them closer to becoming employed, by helping them become employable.

1.4 Education Policy Reform

For the past twenty years, since the establishment of the first democratic government in South Africa in 1994, numerous policies and regulations have been developed that seek to address skills development, unemployment and more specifically education and training for all race groups. This focus is based on addressing the historical legacy of South Africa's apartheid regime. As such the policy reforms try to promote the following governing principles:

- Equity of access
- Quality of provision
- Operation as a system
- Public & private education and training
- Mobility & Progression
- Geographic distribution
- Differentiation

Education Policy Reform

Striving for inclusivity of education:

- Expanded access, improved quality, increased diversity in the types of programme offerings;
- Supporting students from different educational backgrounds;
- Allowing for greater choice & corrections of error in choice.

Striving for quality:

- Greater effectiveness,
- Responsive to the labour market.

(Department of Higher Education and Training 2013; Department of Higher Education 2014)

Skills Development Act (No.97 of 1998) already

"Encouraging employers to create more opportunities for training"

(Theron et al. 2006, p. 10)

(Gibbon, et al., 2012, pp. 133-134)

Specifically the Skills Development Act (No.97 of 1998) (Office of the Presidency 1998) focussed on addressing the consequences of apartheid: high levels of unemployment and poverty; a skewed income distribution and access to opportunity; and simultaneously attracting foreign investment (Statistics South Africa, 2013, p.16; Barry & Norton, 2000 in Mathabe, 2003, p. 1). This Act already identifies employers as necessary training partners to improve skills and increase productivity to make South Africa more competitive in the global economy, and to create a more inclusive and cohesive society, by creating skills development opportunities for the unemployed and others previously denied such opportunities. (Erasmus & van Dyk 2003, p. 29; Hammond, Mabena & Strydom 2011, pp. 17, 18).

NEET youth:

- 15-24 year olds 3.3 million
- 25-34 year olds 4.2 million

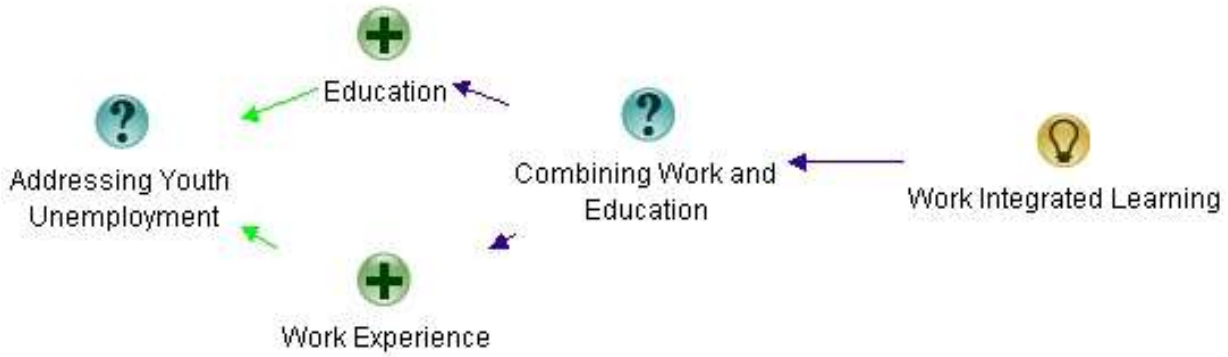
(Statistics South Africa 2014)

Other policies that address youth unemployment include the New Growth Path 2011, the National Youth Policy 2009-2014, the National Skills Accord 2011, the National Development Plan 2011-2030 and White Paper for Post School Education and Training 2013, and are briefly discussed in the Literature Review.

Despite these efforts, South Africa continues to face challenges of youth unemployment, with 3.3 million 15-24 year olds not in employment, education or training (the so-called NEET youth) and 4.2 million 25-34 year olds not in employment, education or training (Statistics South Africa 2014, p. 48).

1.5 Unemployment and Work Integrated Learning

FIGURE 2: HOW IS WIL A SOLUTION TO YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT?



Many countries and professionals see work integrated learning (WIL) as a solution to graduate unemployment (Brauns 2013, p. 11; Moletsane 2012, p. 9; Jonck 2014, pp. 286-287). Even in South Africa, there is growing political support for the idea, to the extent that the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr B Nzimande, has used the phrase "*every workplace a learning space*" (Department of Higher Education and Training 2011) as an objective for the National Skills Accord (Economic Development Department 2011).

When it comes to implementation, support seems less established with employers preferring partnership programmes they are familiar with, such as short work-based exposure for students (Singizi Consulting 2011, p. 18) and apprenticeships (van der Ryst 2012, p. 69). Although employers see the value in programmes such as learnerships, they have concerns about the completeness of the training received by the learners (van der Ryst 2012, p. 51) and highlight that learnerships are *"complicated"* (van der Ryst 2012, p. 52).

Implementation of non-traditional WIL programmes like Learnerships is complicated

Graduates are not finding work easily

WIL a valuable approach but not a "silver bullet" solution for addressing the employability and eventual employment of the youth

This has been exacerbated by the constant policy changes (Zenex Foundation 2013; Jansen & Taylor 2003, pp. 15-27; Lolwana 2012, pp. 8-9) which require a continual adjustment in practice before

ensuring practices endorsed by established legislation have taken root. At this point it seems that the South African government believes it needs to compel education and training institutions to incorporate work integrated learning as a component of the curriculum, and encourage workplaces to participate, by framing this as "*part of their social responsibility*" (Department of Higher Education and Training 2014).

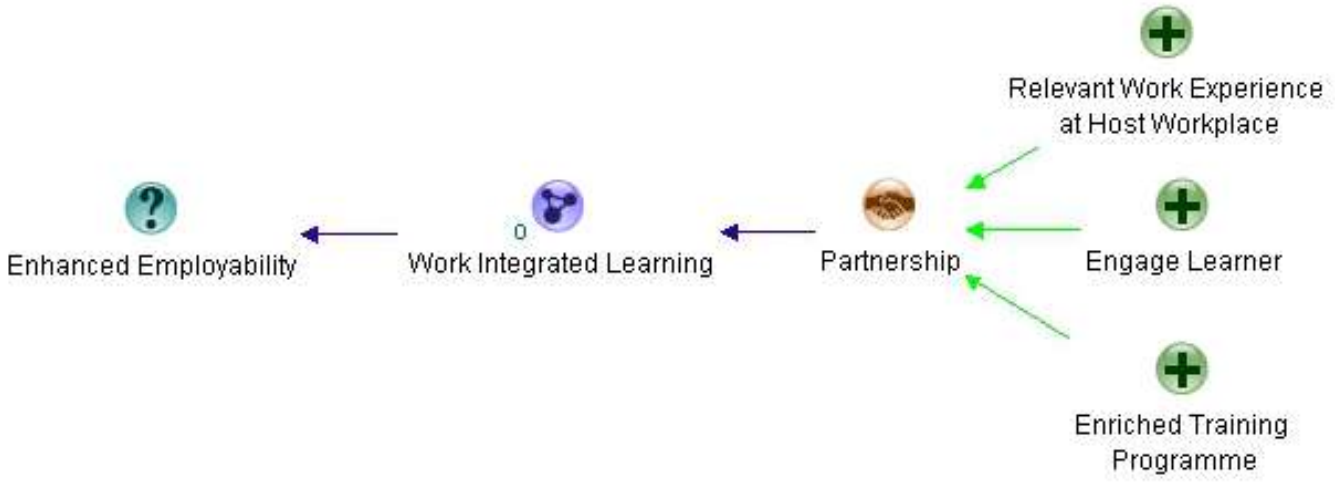
It is implied in these policies that workplace learning is the missing component in graduates becoming employed, as proclaimed in the White paper released by the Department of Higher Education:

> *"Learners exiting universities, TVET colleges and programmes funded by SETAs are not, in general, finding work easily… this seems to relate to a lack of practical workplace experience. Workplace learning must be seen as an integral part of qualification and programme design."*
>
> (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013, p. 64)

While I do not dispute the potential value of work integrated learning I would like to add my voice to that of Blom (Editorial comments 2013, p. viii) who cautions against an assumption, that if every young person completed some form of work-based learning they would find employment as a direct consequence, and the unemployment rate in South Africa and elsewhere would be reduced. This study specifically hopes to test the assumption that experience gained in workplaces, during WIL programmes, will enhance the employability of young people and examine the contribution the workplace environment makes in this enhancement.

1.6 The Concept of Work Integrated Learning

FIGURE 3: WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING PARTNERSHIP



Work Integrated Learning is first and foremost a partnership between the workplace and a training institution to couple structured learning in the class room with purposeful work-experience to develop applied competence and employability (Taylor & Govender 2013, p. 15; Freudenberg, Cameron & Brimble 2011, p. 480). WIL is different from work based learning in that it incorporates both learning in the class room and within the work environment but more than that, it is linked to an educational outcome and a formal curriculum in which learners are required to *"to apply and learn disciplinary knowledge and skills in a real-world context"* (Smith 2012, p. 247). McLennan and Keating (2008, p. 4) note that WIL is useful in providing an engaged learning experience for the learner in a *"rich, contextualised"* environment.

Challenges in implementing WIL programmes for traditional ETD institutes, is that WIL programmes are intent on developing real-world skill and therefore need to consider more *"citizenship, graduateness and employability"* (Council for Higher Education 2011, p. 7) – that is, it asks ETD institutes to consider the work-life and work prospects the training is developing the learners for.

A particular challenge for employers is that WIL placements ask the host employer to extend beyond their normal operations by investing significant time, and extending into the unfamiliar territory of

WIL:
a structured programme that provides learning opportunities in the training room and in a workplace – through meaningful participation in real work

guiding and mentoring a novice in the workplace (McNamara 2013, p. 191; Harris, Jones & Coutts 2010, p. 548).

Accepting that a work integrated learning programme is a "*purposefully-designed learning programme that integrates theoretical knowledge with authentic practice in the workplace*", as proposed by SSACI (SABPP 2014, p. 3) then learnerships in South Africa are considered work integrated learning programmes.

However, many questions remain about: the dynamic nature of the workplace (Unwin et al. 2007, p. 344); how people learn in the workplace (Billett & Choy 2013, p. 270) and how employers can support WIL programmes.

One can be employable but unemployed

(Brown, Hesketh & Williams 2004, p. 217).

1.7 Employability

A distinct focus for this study is exploring how the host employer, in a WIL programme influences unemployed graduates' employability, thus it is important to understand employability. I want to stress that employability is not employment, requiring the learner to secure a job at the end of the programme, but rather the "*potential to obtain a job*" (Yorke 2006, p. 2). Thus it is possible for someone to "*be employable and unemployed*" (Brown, Hesketh & Williams 2004, p. 217) because of the prevailing labour market conditions (Brown, Hesketh & Williams 2003, p. 110).

Employability involves "*job search*" and "*career management*" (Hillage & Pollard 1998, p. 17), as the ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain different employment if required, thereby promoting a certain independence from the labour market (Hillage & Pollard 1998, p. 10) .

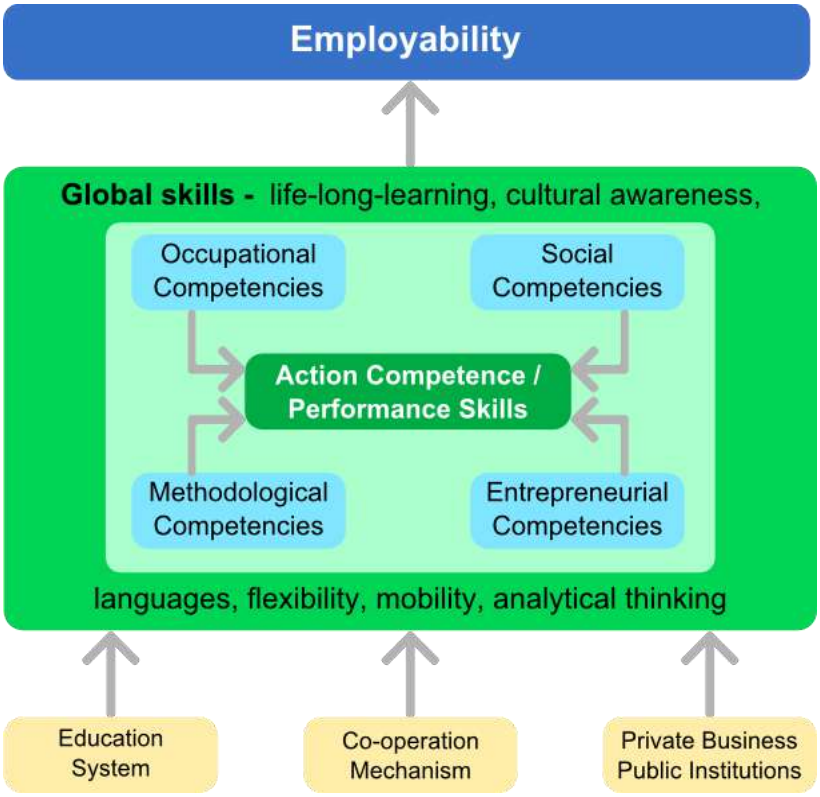
I define **employability as:** the *ability* to find, secure, keep, manage and grow in a job (Rajab, 2014)

I shy away from creating a comprehensive list of employability skills as Hinchcliffe and Jolly (Graduate identity and employability 2011, p. 566) note that it is difficult to create an appropriate list because it will include skills that "*are not wanted"* or *"missing"* and employability is subjective.

Harvey (2003, p. 3) offers a more constructive notion of employability, making employability about developing attributes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job or to progress within a current career. It is about "*learning and the emphasis is less on* 'employ*' and more on* 'ability*'"* (Harvey 2003, p. 3). Harvey (2003, p. 3) adds that the emphasis is on developing critical reflective abilities with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner. Yorke (2006, p. 8) defines employability as "*a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy"*.

This study is not about whether graduates placed on the work integrated learning programme become successfully employed or not, but rather about investigating the role played by employers in improving the capacity of learners to function in a job by supporting the development of skills and attributes that employers will consider as employable.

FIGURE 4: EMPLOYABILITY AND KEY COMPETENCIES (BRAUN 2013, P. 70)



Braun (2013, pp. 69-71) sees the employability competency portfolio as *"bridging the gap between education and job requirements"* (Braun 2013, p. 71) and summarises it pictorially in Figure 4. This shows that for an appropriate employability competency portfolio to be built, it requires proper cooperation mechanisms between the education system and public and private employers, implicit but not shown directly is the influence of socio-economic and socio-political objectives from government who is described as a stakeholder in both the education system (supply side) and employment provision (demand side). Braun (2013) mentions four types of competencies required for employability – occupational (professional or technical competencies), social (relates to interactions with other people), methodological (analytically and problem solving approaches) and entrepreneurial competencies (Braun 2013, p. 71). However, Braun (2013) confirms that the list is incomplete.

1.8 Researcher Background

In addition to feeling compelled to explore how it would be possible to help the millions of unemployed young people in South Africa I have also been working in the skills development arena in South Africa, for more than 15 years. First in my capacity as an employee of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and a Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), and second as the owner/director of a private skills development institution.

My work gave me a thorough understanding of the skills legislation in South Africa both from its intent and the challenges of implementation. In the course of my work I quickly grasped that employers at whom this legislation was aimed, had little understanding on how to implement the regulations linked to new legislation. Employers found the skills development legislation complex and difficult to understand, which may be part of the reason for lack of large scale implementation by employers initially. At the time I realised part of the challenge was that the skills development system had created a "*new language*" for various role players (including employers and professional bodies) engaging with education, training and development.

Initially, the Skills Development Act (No 97 of 1998) (Office of the Presidency 1998) and subsequent amendments were aimed at encouraging companies to skill their workers, open up their workplaces for learning and claim back a portion of the levy as a financial incentive. However, companies required more assistance in understanding the National Qualifications Framework and all related legislation for workplace learning, as they did not understand how to become involved in employee training or how to claim the mandatory grants that employers can access. Whilst many employers were complacent about claiming funds, citing too much bureaucracy, others were enthusiastic to learn about the benefits of skilling their staff.

As part of my activities, as the chief executive officer, in a newly founded

From my own experience, I have come to understand:

- How vast the gap between legislation and its implementation can be;
- How sound strategic intent can be lost in a sea of bureaucracy and paperwork;
- The need for developing a joint understanding of intent;
- The need to test the assumptions on which policy is built.

My experience has also taught me that:

- Each employer is different;
- There is more that impacts learning in the workplace than just providing work experience.

company Resonance Institute of Learning in 2004, I have been advising companies in the private sector as well as organisations in the public sector in South Africa about the implications and benefits of participating in skills development. During this time, I participated in policy development as a board member of the South African Qualifications Authority and the National Skills Authority (NSA), which are advisory bodies to the Minister of Education. My experience at both policy development and implementation enables me to add value to discussions centred on skills development initiatives and youth unemployment in South Africa and is a major contributing factor in conceptualizing the youth development project used in this study.

In 2009 The Department of Higher Education and Training, a newly established department became responsible for Higher Education, Further Education and Training and the Skills Development streams positioning itself as addressing education and training for the post school sector (Department of Higher Education 2012, pp. x,xi). This was a major shift in education and training in South Africa, since for the first time, all categories of post school education and training reside within one ministry. However, with the shift came a vast array of new policies for implementation in a short period of time; one of which was a reduction in mandatory grants to employers resulting in a majority of employers increasingly becoming reluctant to participate in skills development initiatives, or making spaces available within their companies for work integrated learning. Working with employers and with the skills system was proving to be more difficult than in the initial years when skills legislation was promulgated. The rapid change in legislation has led to difficulties in measuring the success or lack thereof of the implementation of skills development initiatives and very few studies have been conducted in this regard.

Finally, having taken an active role in the implementation of skills development legislation for more than twenty years, I am able to reflect on some of the seemingly flawed assumptions of skills development policies, including the assumption that if we train young people and place them at worksites for a short period, they will find employment.

1.9 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand, against the backdrop of massive structural youth unemployment, the interplay between work and learning; firstly, to examine the workplace as a learning

environment which supports the development of skills and attributes that will enhance the employability of young new entrants to the workplace; secondly to investigate the readiness of the workplace to implement work integrated learning programmes.

1.10 The Central Research Question

The study was anchored in a curiosity about what makes the workplace such a defining player in WIL. Watching the project unfold, it became possible not to just chronicle the changes observed but to build a deeper understanding of the relationships and interconnectedness between the partners.

At its heart, this study is focussed on answering: How does the work environment during a WIL programme contribute to enhancing unemployed graduates' employability?

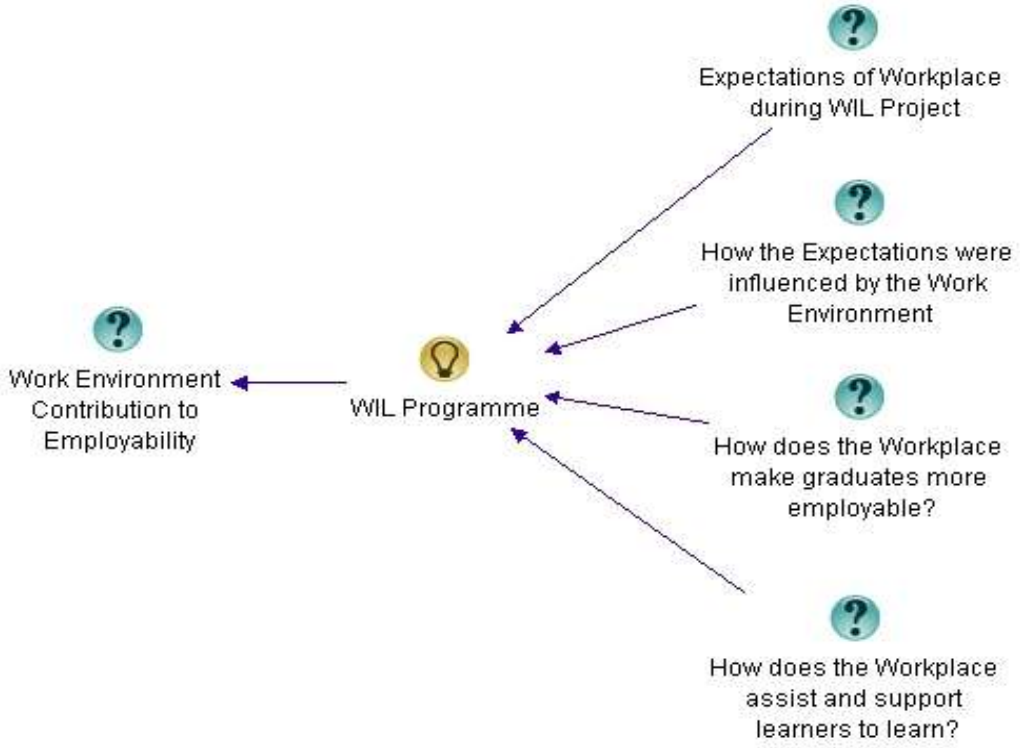
This involves understanding:

- What are the expectations of the workplace during work integrated learning?
- How are these expectations affected by the dynamic work environment?
- How can the workplace assist in making unemployed graduates more employable and what are the processes that should be followed?
- How does the workplace assist and support learners to learn during WIL placements?

Is the workplace ready to implement WIL?

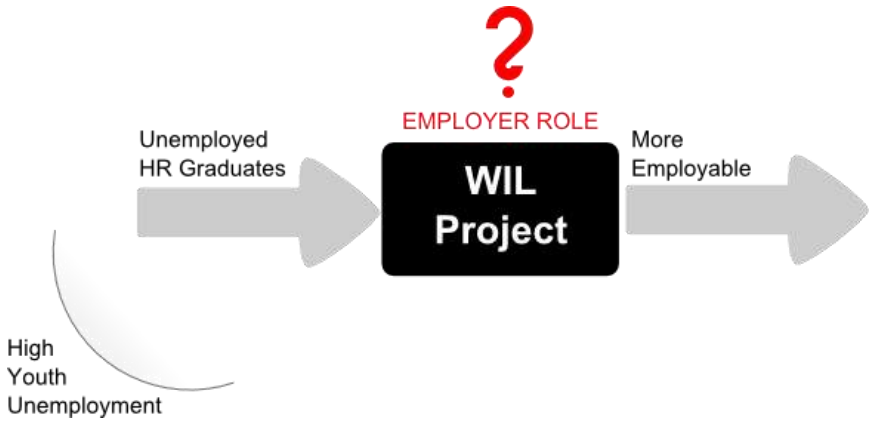
How do work and learning relate to one another?

FIGURE 5: RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Reflecting on the essence of the study, it became clear that I was trying to open the “black-box” of the employer’s role in a WIL project against the backdrop of high youth unemployment as presented in Figure 6 questioning how a WIL project makes someone more employable, but more specifically how the workplace contributes to the employability of an individual.

FIGURE 6: BASIC SCHEMATIC OF THE STUDY – INVESTIGATING THE EMPLOYER ROLE



1.11 Defining the Study

At this point I would like to clearly differentiate between the study and the work integrated learning project that was implemented. The main impact of this differentiation is that the study is not focused on the content of the programme but rather the mechanisms and processes that evolved around the WIL project in which this study is located.

Factors that make this study unique are: that it involves twenty unemployed graduates as participants; and that the learnership is designed to fill a gap identified by the employer for a new position with regard to the administration of skills development within the Human Resources unit of the company. The objective of the project was to capacitate unemployed HR graduates with an additional qualification to assist employers to manage, administer and respond to the need to take on young learners for workplace experience within a youth paradigm. The qualified youth development practitioner specialises in handling major issues with regard to recruitment, placement and progress of interns and apprentices for the company. Through studying the dynamics within the project, it was possible to observe learners, managers, mentors and teams in the workplace context. The chosen work integrated learning approach for the project was that of a Learnership, based on the understanding that a Learnership is a work centred qualification building *"occupation specific skills"* and "*generic outcomes*" and "*competencies"* relevant to the "*work context*" (National Qualifications Framework 2013, p. 6)**.** Finally, the project involved the participation of employers for the workplace learning component where managers and mentors at the nine worksites also became participants of the study.

1.12 The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Project

According to Cooper, et al (Work Integrated Learning : A Guide To Effective Practice 2010, p. 40) work integrated learning is the process of integrating formal learning and productive work "*to give students a complete, integrated learning experience".* This means that WIL requires the workplace and the institution to collaboratively deliver and support the education and training programme. The WIL project around which this study was built is summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1: WIL PROJECT VARIABLES

Host Employers	Two large corporates in the automotive industry, involved in apprentice training
Institution	A private training provider that specialises in work based learning. Integrating and adapting, mainly, learnership base qualifications to address the workplace needs
Learners	Unemployed HR graduates who had completed either an HR related certificate or diploma
Qualification	Youth Development Practitioner Learnership, aimed at developing the necessary communication and administration skills to assist with the administration of other work based learning programmes. In addition develop the necessary counselling and advocacy to support new entrants in the workplace. Enable the learners to present in public and be prepared to participate in recruitment drives. Finally include personal development and project management to allow the learners to manage their own progress and work.

FIGURE 7: STAKEHOLDERS IN THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WIL PROJECT

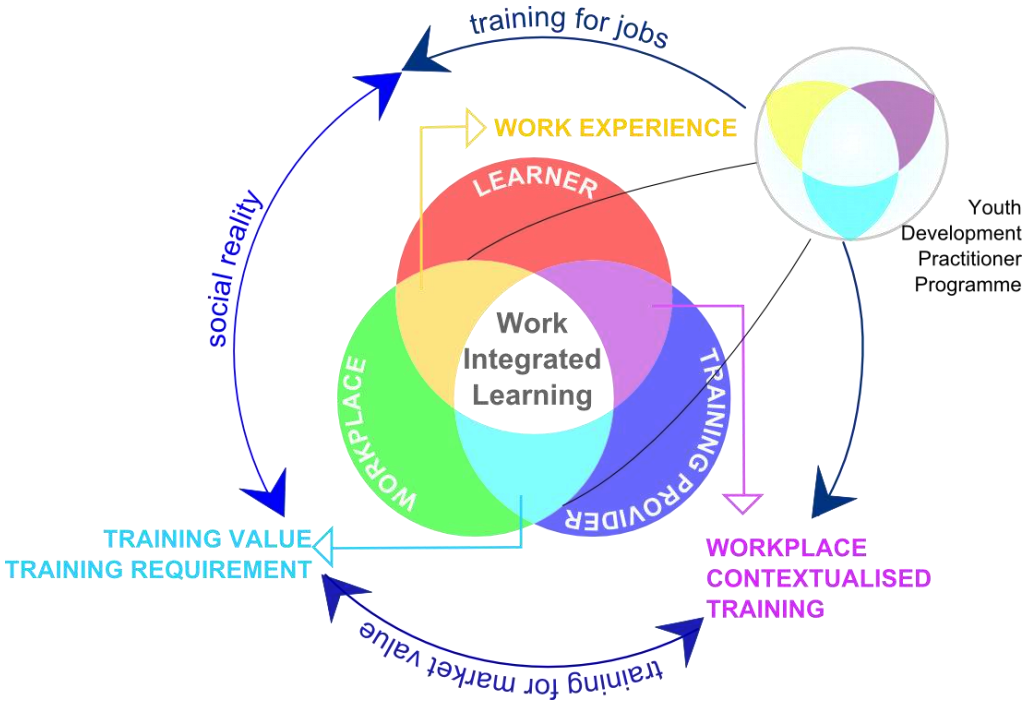


Figure 7

Figure 7illustrates the partnership and collaboration between the three stakeholders (employer, education, training and development provider and learner) in a work integrated learning programme. Before commencement of the project, all stakeholders reached an agreement to participate in the work integrated learning (WIL) programme. According to Forbes (2006, p. 6) the aspect that distinguishes work-integrated learning from pure work-based or experiential learning is the role that negotiation plays between the academic institution, the learner and the employer.

1.12.1 Why the Youth Development Qualification?

The Youth Development Practitioner Programme – building the capacity within host employer to coordinate and manage more WIL programmes

Despite the purposes of the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 (Office of the Presidency 1998) being clearly advocated, I observed that employers consider their role of implementing programmes in the workplace, time-consuming and a huge administrative burden. Most companies assigned the administration of work integrated learning (WIL) programmes to the Human Resources (HR) unit of the company. HR personnel are not specifically trained to manage and support learners during WIL resulting in the process becoming onerous, discouraging employers to host learners in the workplace. Human Resource Management (HRM) generally is the organisational function that deals with issues such as compensation, hiring, performance management, organisational development, safety, wellness, benefits, employee motivation, communication, administration, and training (Deadrick & Stone 2014, pp. 193-195). Dealing with the youth and rolling out a work integrated learning programme in the workplace seemed to require something else.

In addition, employers are often faced with large numbers of applications from unemployed young people for apprenticeship positions and this requires thorough screening before learners are appropriately selected for such WIL programmes. The recruitment and selection process is challenging, time consuming and an expense to the company (Stuart 2012, p. 251). Also liaising with various stakeholders involved in a WIL intervention is difficult and complex – managing the *"flow of resources*", "*stakeholder relationships*" and cooperation, and "*formalising the transactions*" required to enable a cooperative training partnership (Mummenthey & du Preez 2010, p. 2). Together these overheads have created the need for a full time coordinator in the HR unit of the company who understands the youth paradigm and who must be able to liaise with the communities from which the unemployed youth come.

I therefore decided to look for a programme that is most suitable to assist employers in dealing with the youth during work integrated learning processes.

1.12.2 The Design of the Youth Development Programme

Developing unemployed graduates to help other unemployed youths gain access to employment

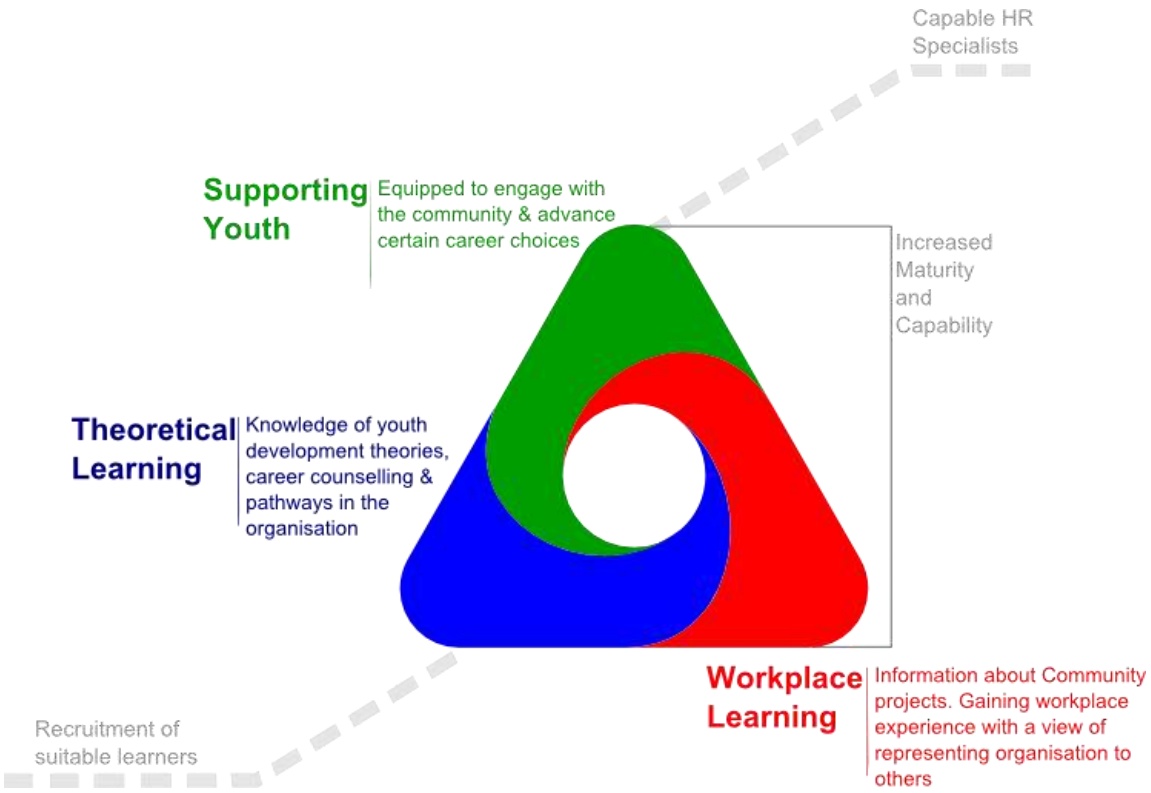
The programme that met the employers' needs most closely was the National Certificate: Youth Development. The programme was further customised to enhance the development of the young, previously unemployed learners with the aim of enabling them to support other young unemployed people transition into the workplace through a WIL programme. This included helping the learners understand the plight of young people in South Africa. Given the intention of locating the eventual position in the HR Department, I decided to train individuals who had a qualification in Human Resource Management so that the contractual obligations of the employer was already understood and could also be taken care of by the same individual.

In liaising with the employers, a particular emphasis to include work readiness, personal development and workplace mentorship to enhance the uniqueness of the programme was necessary. The Youth Development Learnership programme was designed in a modular way, giving opportunity for ongoing amendments to address any shortcomings. It also provided opportunity to incorporate specific employer requirements during the course of the programme. While the programme was still underway, certain adjustments, to incorporate the ongoing insights, were made, for example the inclusion of a short course on workplace etiquette.

Figure 8 illustrates the components of the Youth Development programme that was designed by Resonance Institute of Learning which includes theoretical learning, workplace learning and a practice component of supporting the youth. In essence it is a learnership that has been customised to recruit and train HR graduates as Youth Development practitioners who in turn assist employers during implementation of work integrated learning projects such as apprenticeships as they increase their developmental maturity within the HR unit. The qualification includes modules that are aligned to the outcomes as registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The programme included a workplace implementation component and learners were expected to complete and submit specific workplace tasks for assessments and credits towards the qualification. According to Cooper, et

al. (2010, p. 62) "*the unpredictable nature of work integrated learning environments necessitates structuring the learning through explicit use of intended learning outcomes*". The workplace tasks were therefore compiled into a template designed in a way that portfolios of evidence as proof of workplace implementation could be submitted on an ongoing basis throughout the project for assessment of competency achieved by learners.

FIGURE 8: THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME DESIGN



The purpose of the Youth Development qualification is to prepare practitioners who are responsible for the development of young adults in initiatives designed to develop the youth and to integrate them into the working economy and society. On completing the qualification, the individual would be knowledgeable about professional conduct, protocol and networking. The core components include facilitation, coaching and mentoring, and lay-counselling. An important aspect was to ensure that the programme included project management, research and communication skills as prescribed the South African Qualifications Authority.

Engaging with young people to become part of the solution to Youth unemployment

The development of this qualification was timely – the strong focus of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the government at large, on the problems of the youth, exacerbated by the legacy of apartheid, provided impetus to the development. According to the Umsombomvu Youth Fund established by government in 2003, and other youth development agencies across the world, youth development is an integrated and positive approach that recognises the assets and strengths of young people rather than focusing only on their problems and limitations (Schulman & Davies 2007, p. 12). The programme took this approach into consideration.

1.13 Methodology

A qualitative exploratory research study, in which the case study methodology is adopted, proved to be the most suitable. The case study afforded me the best opportunities to explore and describe the *"phenomena in context, using a variety of data sources"* (Baxter & Jack 2008, p. 544). Acting as a participant observer, I was able to critically investigate the evolution of the various outcomes (Yin 2014, p. 19) of the Youth Development WIL programme without controlling events and interactions in the workplace (Schell 1992, p. 2). This allowed me to answer the "*how*" and "*why*" of workplace learning underlying the research questions.

Data from a variety of sources such as interviews, questionnaires, company profile of the companies and visual representations was collected and encoded. Data was analysed to identify themes in line with the main research questions of the study in order to illuminate the case.

1.14 Limitations of the Study

It is important to indicate, upfront, that this study has been conducted within a skills development company founded by myself. In order to maintain my objectivity for the research study, I recognised that my involvement in the project may influence the approach to the study. Hence I limited my involvement in the project and focussed on the problem and research question of the study.

Secondly, it must be emphasised that the study was conducted in a work integrated learning project that was specifically designed for an employer within the automotive industry who expressed a specific need to close a gap within the Human Resource units in the various worksites which form part of the company group structure. Hence, there was a limited sample size and the case study approach (one cohort of learners) which raise external validity issues around the transferability and generalisation of the results. To understand the applicability of the results to other situations they are compared to studies from different industries and different WIL approaches (where available). Further I highlight in the discussion and particular findings where similar issues have occurred in other WIL projects that I have been involved in. Particular findings that are peculiar to this study are also identified.

In addition, the measures of learning improvements were obtained through manager and learner-reported data rather than measures of actual learning and development. Alternative interpretations and perspectives are contrasted to develop a more holistic understanding of the findings. Again, this is compared to existing literature to ensure a sound basis for interpretation.

The unemployed graduates that have participated in the study were paid a minimal stipend during the one year placement on a Learnership project. The amount paid may have had a bearing on the final selection of candidates through the recruitment process since a large number of applicants turned down the opportunity when they were told what the stipend was.

Finally, the cohort of learners that were recruited to participate in the work integrated learning programme was selected from the greater Johannesburg area for convenience of placement with employers. The selection was extended to include potential candidates from Pretoria only when it became necessary to have the full complement of twenty learners within a prescribed time limit.

1.15 Ethical Considerations

All participants involved in the study have provided written consent to be interviewed. Letters were written to workplace supervisors and learners participating in the study requesting permission from participants to use any information obtained during the study such as transcripts of interviews, notes made during observations at the workplace, and any audio taped evidence. The letter also indicated that the participant acknowledges that all information received in the course of the study will be

confidential and safe. The participant was advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were further informed that any data that is collected during the study would be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of the study.

1.16 Understanding Work Integrated Learning

Equally as difficult as developing a universal definition for employability is defining work integrated learning. This is because work integrated learning is an *"umbrella term"* (Patrick et al. 2008, p. 9), and practitioners, employers and others all use different terms to refer to the various practices used in WIL which include service based learning, cooperative education, professional practice programmes, apprenticeships, sandwich education, practicum and others such as the Learnerships in South Africa (Groenewald et al. 2011, p. 19; Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 39).

For this study I have combined the different researchers' definitions of WIL to explain the concept as:

> *…..a learning programme on the continuum between work-based learning and institutional learning in which the learning is facilitated by both the workplace and the training provider to enable the learners to meet specific educational and work task requirements, learn about themselves and about the world-of-work.*

Although WIL universally involves the combination of training and workplace experience via a curriculum the actual implementation of WIL encompasses a range of approaches (philosophies) and strategies (methods, sequencing and placement) that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum (Patrick et al. 2008, p. iv; Blom 2014, p. 5).

One of the challenges for the modern workplace is a continuous and pervasive *"need for learning"* (Raelin 2008, p. 1) and individuals are expected to be able to learn from their own experience and that of others (Eraut 2006, p. 5; Lee & Lai 2012, p. 4) whilst many people have *"forgotten how to learn in conjunction with their experience"* (Raelin 2008, p. xv). As Fenwick (Toward Enriched Conceptions of Work Learning: Participation, Expansion, and Translation Among Individuals With/In Activity 2006, p. 286) and Billet (2004, p. 317) observe learning in the workplace is *"understood to emerge from relations and interactions of people with the social and material elements of particular contexts"* (Fenwick 2006,

p. 286). Cooper et al (2010) describe the process of building of close relationships as connectivity and claim that integration occurs through connectivity and transformation (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 40). Transformation takes place when there are changes in developmental and policy process when thinking and action are connected (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 40). Tynjälä and Nikannen (2009, p. 131) confirm that integration occurs at individual level, organisational level and the system level.

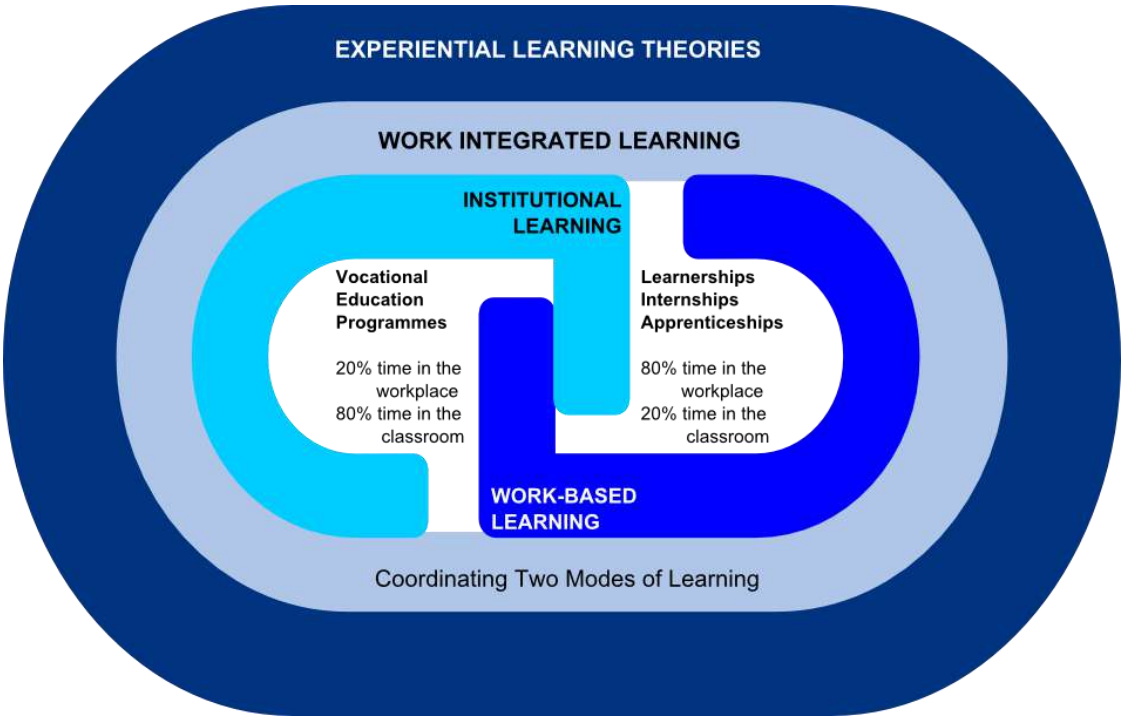
Underpinning a work integrated learning programme is the notion of learning by doing as expanded by the learning theories of Kolb, Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Freire, Follet, Lewin and Rogers (Kolb et al. 2014, pp. 211-229). Considering the learning experiences at work Volanen (2009) proposes more learning dimensions of:

- Learning to be at work – accounting for both the socialisation that happens at work and its impact on the individuals identity as proposed by Wenger (2000, p. 238) – becoming dependable
- Learning to do and learning by doing – meeting expectations of quality and becoming an example
- Learning the making and by making – understanding the subtleties of doing, what the limits and variables are, how to adapt to the context of the process

(Volanen 2009, pp. 49-52)

I also provide my own understanding of the different categories of work integrated learning programmes that exist in South Africa as a relational diagram presented in Figure 9.The diagram also serves to indicate the distinction between experiential learning theories, work integrated learning and the different modes of learning such as internships, apprenticeships, and learnerships opposed to vocational programme types offered full time by ETD institutions in South Africa.

FIGURE 9: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE META-THEORY, THE MECHANISM AND THE MODES OF LEARNING (RAJAB, 2013)



The diagram presented in Figure 9 indicates that for this study, WIL is considered an umbrella term which incorporates any learning which has a practical workplace component as well as a theoretical institutional component as the mechanism of learning. However, the time spent in the workplace differs resulting in the modes of learning, that is, institutional based if more than 80% of the time is spent at the institution as opposed to work based if more than 80% of time is spent in the workplace.

1.16.1 Not all Work Experience is the Same

Billet and Choy (Billett & Choy 2013, p. 264) remind us that "*current conceptual and procedural understandings of learning in the workplace… are limited because learning in the workplace is multimodal and complex and is influenced by a "socio-cultural nature"*.

To understand this complexity it assists to review Guile and Griffiths (2001, p. 120) classification of the provision of work experience into five different approaches, namely:

1. *Traditional* – learners are placed in the workplace without specific guidance or facilitation;
2. *Experimental* – work experience is structured around the learner's development and training objectives and the training provider remains responsible for the preparation and debriefing of the learner with the workplace remaining responsible for the workplace supervision (practice is linked to Experiential Learning Theories (Kolb et al. 2014, pp. 213-221));
3. *Generic* – the key objective is developing the learners' application of general knowledge and development of generic skills, as determined by the negotiated curriculum, in the workplace. Learners are assessed on their workplace application of knowledge through compiling portfolios of evidence;
4. *Work Process* – learners are exposed to a complete work process in different contexts. Their training is supplemented with coaching support to help them adjust and gain the most insight from participating in the work process (linked to developing communities of practice as defined by Wenger (2000, pp. 229-238));
5. *Connective* – the workplace is evaluated and divided into multiple "e*nvironments for learning"*, learners are then trained and exposed to different work situations in an iterative and collaborative manner between the workplace and the provider helping the learners evaluate both the knowledge they gain and the work experience and reformulate it within their own context. This approach views *"individuals in the workplace are part of an organic enterprise, one that they both help to shape and are shaped by"* (Unwin et al. 2007, p. 344).

(Guile & Griffiths 2001, p. 120; Tynjälä 2009, pp. 21-23)

According to Billet (2014, p. 3) workplace learning experiences differ in form, purpose, duration, circumstance and the degree by which they are supported within the educational institution and workplace settings. Thus, it is clear that not all work experience can lead to the same learning and development outcomes and cannot be considered equal. Without even considering the unique characteristics of each workplace or worksite, the approach with which the work experience is coordinated and developed potentially determines a different outcome.

1.16.2 Training Provider Participation in WIL

Smith (2012, pp. 247-248) identifies that WIL is becoming ever more important to institutions involved in higher education because of a government focus on productivity, employer needs and dissatisfaction

regarding the work-readiness of traditional programme graduates and students looking for programmes that offer them an advantage when it comes to gaining access to employment. In South Africa much of the WIL activities come in response to the strong emphasis from government on *"transforming workplace education"* (Smith, Jennings & Solanki 2005, p. 538) and addressing youth unemployment (Hammond, Mabena & Strydom 2011, pp. 17, 18).

What is new, is the scale and diversity of student engagement in the workplace as a result of variety in the approaches taken, as institutions and *"disciplines innovate and adapt to meet the specialised need of their partners"* (Patrick et al. 2008, p. 14). This is due to learning in and through the workplace being driven by strategic institutional imperatives as a priority on both *"institutional and national agendas"*, and motivations – helping institutions gain a *"competitive edge in the market of student enrolment"* (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 23). In addition WIL asks institutions to confront the "*ubiquitous and multi-dimensionality of human learning*" and this variety in interpretation and understanding generates "*a plurality of approaches*" (Sawchuk 2010, p. 366).

Institutions are now involved in preparing students for work, developing curricula with the workplace in mind, preparing and negotiating with workplaces for the placement, supervising and supporting the workplace experience, assessing the outcomes of the workplace experience. (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 33). However, South Africa has a long way to go in this regard and much work still needs to be done both on the part of institutions and employers participation.

Various authors raise conflicting agendas and perspectives about the purpose of WIL held by the workplace and the institution including:

- Meeting particular learning objectives by *learning at work* (the workplace is a learning space providing planned learning experiences)
- Providing general work experience to enrich the learning experience by *learning in work* (learning from the experience of working, in a less structured way, by observing, asking questions, problem solving and more)
- Becoming employment ready by *learning to work*

(Jacobs & Park 2009, p. 140; Solomon et al. 2001, p. 276; Kyndt & Baert 2013, p. 275)

Another distinctive feature of the WIL is the need to prepare learners for the complex social, inter-personal landscape in the workplace, helping them *"learn to negotiate with others about working together"* and learning from them (Billet 2014, p. 689) whereas Down (2006, p. 187) notes it is often about navigating social paradoxes such as reconciling cooperative and competitive tendencies from the same person, trying to find a space for oneself, maintaining interest not only in the work but also the work colleagues regardless of perceptions of monotony or boredom. Down (2006) is at pains to emphasise that it is not just about developing the skills necessary to navigate such realities, it is about *"their preparedness for the complexity of contemporary workplaces"* (Down 2006, p. 203).

This means carefully considering the curriculum, how the learning processes are to be supported and managed in the workplace and by whom (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 106). Billet and Choy (Billett & Choy 2013) raise additional considerations for the workplace of today, that needs to be incorporated in the curriculum, programme planning and management:

1. Changing requirements of work , such as using new tools and equipment, updates in process and decision making or occupational standards and regulations;
2. Understanding the processes of learning, building those competencies within the workplace support structure but also accepting that particularly for collaborative learning and work practices *"it remains unclear how such collaborative processes can best occur"* (Billett & Choy 2013, p. 268);
3. The learner's own drive to learn will influence what they learn.

According to Johnston (2011, p. 305) consideration should be given to preparing the students for the workplace, establishing the necessary disciplinary (academic) framework and a "*workplace-based emergent curriculum, which unfolds uniquely for each student".*

Choy and Delahaye (2011, p. 158), stress that *"alignment of academic content to workplace activities is often complicated and challenging for academics",* and that the academics also struggle to develop "*real stakeholder ownership*" from the workplace (Choy & Delahaye 2011, p. 159).

Establishing an effective partnership with a workplace, or a number of workplaces is critical for a training provider wishing to establish a substantive WIL programme (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 33). For this to transcend a simple work placement into a "*reciprocal partnership*" requires shared

values and an understanding of the integrated learning processes to be followed (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 34). Harris, et al (2010) note that *"for universities the creation of placement learning sites requires often time consuming searches and negotiations, whilst their ongoing servicing requires briefings, liaison and maintenance"* this means that it becomes difficult for them to justify the added investment in time, effort and energy to manage a single placement (Harris, Jones & Coutts 2010, p. 548). To make the investment from the workplace and the institution worthwhile, Harris et al advocate establishing a long-term partnership in which learners are not just confined to work experience but also assist in problem solving, research or special project activities (Harris, Jones & Coutts 2010, pp. 557-558). In addition Harris, et al (2010), consider that learners should be placed in groups rather than individually (Harris, Jones & Coutts 2010, pp. 557-558). Cooper, et al. (2010, p. 34), encourage that the training provider and the workplace need to develop a synergy – forming a connected and mutually supportive WIL partnership.

Fundamentally Harris, et al (2010, p. 547) recommend that both training providers and workplaces consider *"collaborating on student learning…as a stepping-stone towards broader partnership activity"*

1.16.3 Workplace Participation

Bolt (2008, p. 64) observes that "*approaches to training and development focused either on the individual needs, results or human resource planning but did not consider the needs of both the organisation and individuals simultaneously*". This is problematic from two perspectives for this study as already established:

- WIL requires a synergistic partnership between the workplace and the training provider (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 34), and
- Part of the reason for employability skills reaching prominence is that the learner or student is expected to take ownership of, and direct their own career, that is *"develop resilience and flexibility and manage an uncertain future"* (Jasman & McIlveen 2011, p. 125).

In a similar way the assumption that careers no longer *"unfold according to roughly predictable developmental stages"* (Jasman & McIlveen 2011, p. 120) no longer holds. Thus if there is an

expectation of continual change in the workplace and for the learners career it becomes important that *"learning to be co-mingled with work"* (Raelin 2008, p. 12).

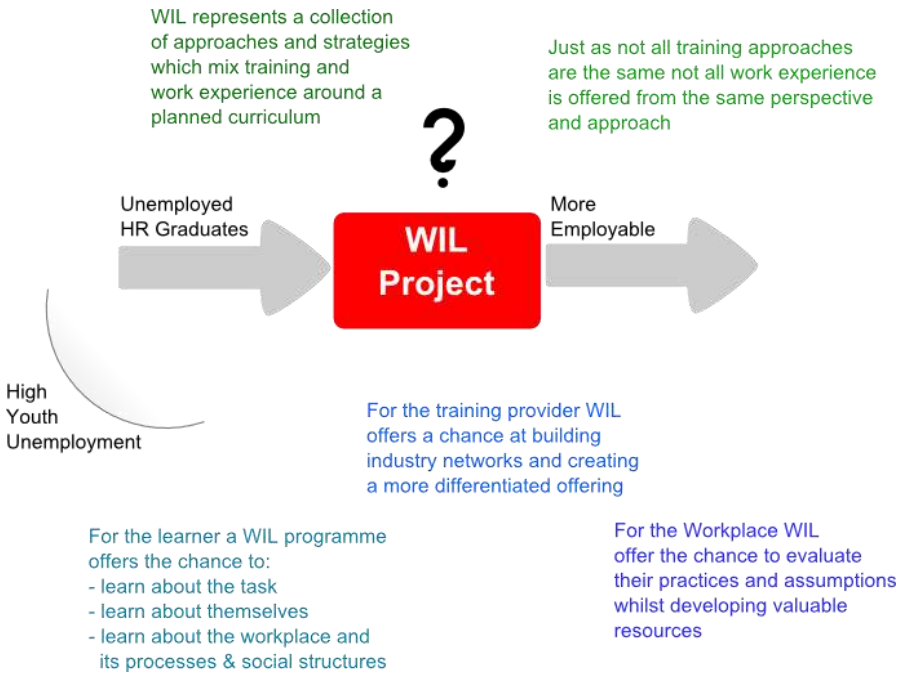
In their extensive work exploring work placements, apprenticeships and work related learning in organisations in the UK, Fuller and Unwin (2004) have identified that there is a marked difference in the learning environments offered by workplaces (Fuller & Unwin 2004, p. 129). In exploring why this may be the case they identified that structure, process and context (Felstead et al. 2011, p. 5) play an important part of defining the work experience and the work-based learning environment. Focussing on the context and structure Felstead, et al. (2011, p. 5) advocate scoping the learning requirements of an organisation through understanding its:

- *Structures of production*: the contextual hierarchies in which the learning happens. Linking the macro-economic stakeholders to the micro-economic stakeholders of the particular channel. That is understanding the international and local economies, policies and governances that the work is performed under; the organisational ownership and management structure; and finally the team by whom the work is actually performed;
- *Stages of production*: this is akin to understanding the organisation's value chain, how it transforms the raw materials into products, brings them to market and the relationship it has with its customers
- *Employee discretion:* the micro-political structures inside the organisation which determine the level of autonomy and discretion the employees have in decision-making and performing their work.

(Felstead et al. 2011, pp. 7-9)

It is only by positioning the learning in this socio-economic landscape that Felstead, et al. (2011, p. 5) feel that it will be possible to *"connect individual and organisational learning"* (Fuller & Unwin 2004, p. 142) to create *"learning activities that arise naturally as part of the work process"* and gain sufficient buy-in and support from the organisation to be sustained.

FIGURE 10: BASIC SCHEMATIC OF THE STUDY – WIL SUMMARY



This need for a deep understanding of the localised dynamics (micro-political environment) the learner is exposed to; and the alignment to the strategic landscape and the operational structure in order to make work-integrated learning meaningful and valuable to the organisation is shared by Rhodes and Shiel (2007, p. 185). Other factors Rhodes and Schiel highlight for the successful implementation of a WIL programme is the necessity for comprehensive project and partner management to support the project Rhodes and Shiel (2007, p. 176).

Finally, even though they have worked with numerous organisations in various sectors Fuller et al (2007, pp. 755-757), still feel that the learning processes – beyond how learning is supported by an individual manager or mentor to create a reliable learning framework – is not well understood and requires more investigation. Therefore, if we are to make "*every workplace a learning space*", then we need to explore the workplace with its various challenges, structures and dynamics of the work environment. Literature on the role learning plays in the workplace and how it is managed is also considered. In addition, recognising that for most South Africans *"the value of learning through doing is*

not disputed" (Blom 2013, p. viii) for this project, the specific contribution of the workplace towards employability for NEET youth is of interest.

1.17 The Workplace

One of the most distinctive features of workplace learning is that the *"learning that takes place in working life and at the workplace originates in the technical-organisational and social conditions in which the employees are involved"* (Illeris 2004, p. 433). From a learning perspective the workplace is *"a complex learning context shaped by different forms of knowledge creation, economic concerns and technological advances*" (Jonasson 2014, p. 548), where work and learning have become intertwined processes (*"in space and time"*) (Boud 2006, p. 77), and any individual is simultaneously a learner and a worker.

1.17.1 The Work Environment and Decision Making Structures

The work environment and decision making structures in an organisation provide the context, within which individuals learn, work and grow their work-network *and "this is central to the potential for their success"* (Gerber 1998, p. 170). Guile and Griffiths (, p. 114) note that most studies of learning in the workplace have *"played down the influence of context upon learning or have approached this issue in a very mechanistic way".*

"*The social and physical environment of the workplace has a profound influence on work itself, the relationships between workers and their work and the personal lives of workers*" (Solomon, Boud & Rooney 2006, p. 3), it is this that makes the workspace an "*active learning space*" (Kyndt, Dochy & Nijs 2009, p. 370). In this context even the physical workspaces define and transform an individual's *"sense of agency*" Eraut (2006, p. 6). In short, Eraut (2006, p. 6) highlights that a workplace needs to provide space and time, for the activities they require or desire. To recognise the full potential of the workplace as a learning space it is important to consider work not only as "*a context which students learn about*" rather it "*is a context through which students can learn and develop*" (Guile & Griffiths 2001, p. 117). These spaces need not be those traditionally associated with work or learning but rather social spaces and spaces of opportunity, such as sharing a ride to work, during coffee breaks, etc. (Solomon, Boud & Rooney 2006, p. 4).

Additionally although the workplace learning may appear to be unstructured and unplanned it is often more about discovering what the organising principles are. In many cases these are moulded to ensure "*workplace continuity*" which is secured through learning (Billet 2004, p. 313).

In the workplace "*learning comes from interaction*" with people and tools (Billet 2004, p. 315). Hence, if this takes place within a structured environment, then it is necessary to understand this structure.

1.17.1.1 People Management Processes and Practices

Recognising both, that the primary mechanism through which an organisation shapes itself is its decision and management structures (Luhmann 2012, p. 296), and that managers play a pivotal role in shaping the organisational environment (Buchanan & Hucsynski 2004, p. 366) through which learning happens – I start by reviewing the management and coordination structures in an organisation with a specific focus on Human Resource Management and the development of people within an organisation especially since Human Resource Development is seen to be the responsibility of the Human Resource unit of most companies. This is an important context for the study since learner participants within the study come with an HR background.

One of the biggest assumptions made in WIL practice is that programmes can be coordinated through the training manager or HRD specialist in the HR department (Winberg et al. 2011). The literature however revealed that this function is often distributed to the line managers (Kabst & Wehner 2013, pp. 38-41) and their support would critically depend to what extent they understand that training and learning in the workplace can provide a competitive advantage.

Thus the individual manager is able to shape an employee's learning and development by:

- Creating a *climate* of approachability which values the development of individuals;
- Building *relationships* with their team members in which they engage in supportive learning dialogues about work and other concerns;
- Providing frequent, clear and *focussed feedback;*
- Expose the learner to various *learning opportunities* including informal coaching and special project work; and

- Offering *active career development,* helping the individual gain a clear understanding of their potential and career possibilities without ignoring the individuals interests and past experience.

(Eraut (2012) interpreting the work done by Hirsh, Silverman, Tamkin, & Jackson (2004) with the Institute for Employment Studies)

1.17.1.2 Work and Identity

For most people work is also the *"foundation"* on which they build their *"identity"* (Zorc-Maver 2012, p. 224). The interplay between work and identity relates to what extent people find their work *"meaningful"* (Kira & Balkin 2014, p. 131). The changeable nature of a work identity and the meaning of work is confirmed by Anurdha, et al. (2014, p. 7) who observe *"work means different things to different people",* and different things to the same person at different times.

For people to remain engaged in work and learning around work it is important that "*employees are able to do the work and willing to do the work, but"* more so they need to feel that *"they are making a real contribution through the work (finding meaning and purpose in their work), their interest in what they are doing diminishes and their productivity wanes*" (Ulrich 2014, p. 2) so learning becomes about a continual reinforcement of *"significance, coherence, direction and belonging"* (Schnell, Höge & Pollet 2013, p. 550) from the managers. This would apply especially to learners placed in the workplace during work integrated learning. What identity does a learner have in the workplace?

1.17.1.3 New Entrants in the Workplace

Eraut (2012) working with workplace entrants in the engineering, healthcare and accounting field, collated a set of work processes in which learning happened these are summarised in Table 2. The individual experiences reported varied widely but Eraut (2012) was able to identify that *"their success depended on both the available opportunities and the quality of relationships in the workplace"* (Eraut 2012, p. 23).

TABLE 2: A TYPOLOGY OF EARLY CAREER LEARNING (ERAUT 2012, P. 23)

Work Processes with learning as a by-product	***Learning Activities*** located within work or learning processes	***Learning Processes*** at or near the workplace
Participation in group processes	Asking questions	Being supervised
Working alongside others, for an extended period	Getting information	Being coached
Consultation	Locating resource people	Being mentored
Tackling challenging tasks or roles	Listening and observing	Shadowing
Joint problem solving	Reflecting	Visiting other sites
Trying things out	Learning from mistakes	Conferences
Consolidating, extending and refining skills	Giving and receiving feedback	Short courses
Working with clients	Use of mediating artefacts	Working for a qualification
		Independent study

Eraut (2012, p. 27) notes that particular attention should be paid to the work allocation decisions and these should take into account the nature of the work, the work scheduling and the impact of decisions by the manager and experienced colleagues.

Essentially the manager end up playing a mediating role in balancing the learning factors (challenge of the work, feedback and support, the learner's personal agency and motivation) with the work context factors (allocation and structuring of work, the encounters with people, individual participation and their performance expectations) (Eraut, 2012)

1.17.1.4 Organisational Learning

Starting from the position that people and organisations are learning *"all the time"* and learning in an organisational context is *"something that is not stable, not even defined or understood ahead of time"* – at least not from the *"learner's point of view"* (Kyndt, Dochy & Nijs 2009, p. 370) – I turn to organisational learning to explore how learning in the workplace can be directed.

Organisational learning has been defined from many different perspectives (Tynjälä & Nikannen 2009, p. 118). Organisational learning has to account for the dual meaning of learning (the learning process and the resultant learning) and the dual meaning of organisation (as an institution or as a body of structures and rules) (Schilling & Kluge 2009, p. 338).

Concentrating on the learning organisation as an organisation capable of sustaining continuous learning (Kirwan 2013, p. 70), Small and Irvine (2006, p. 286) identify the pertinent organisational priorities required as:

- Supporting and encouraging learning as a continuous process – learning recognised as critical for the organisations continued existence, it consists of a continual adaptation to market needs, with each iteration being supported by the required training and development and assessment of the impact of changes made;
- Promoting people development – people are viewed as knowledge assets and steps are taken to develop and support them to increase productivity and profitability in the short and long term;
- Listening to customers – using feedback mechanisms to remain in touch with its business environment and continuously adapting to the market needs.

(Small & Irvine 2006, pp. 288-291)

Pulling all these processes and constructs together, organisational learning is best described in terms of its impact in that *"organisational learning makes organisations do things differently, or at least think about them differently"* (Kirwan 2013, p. 49); it is all about managing and developing organisational capacity and capability. *"Where* capability *is not an assessment of the skills or performance of individual staff or students, but rather a synergistic measure of the coherence and strength of the environment provided by the organisation they work within"* (Marshall 2010, p. 147).

1.17.1.5 A Learning Culture

Understanding that the modern organisation is a "*consciously designed form of human association"* (Watson 2003, p. 77). Organisational culture represents the social context within which learning takes place at the workplace, the sociological dimension of organisational learning, that is how learning happens in the workplace and how organisations "*contrive improved ways of sustaining and fostering*

learning processes" (Sense 2011, p. 987). Fundamentally, organisational culture *"defines a common way of seeing things, sets the decision making patterns and establishes the value system"* (Itami & Roehl 1991, p. 23) for an organisation (Sikora & Ferris 2014, p. 274).

Thus an organisation with a learning culture is one where:

- Learning is ingrained in people's thinking;
- There are processes for learning together; and
- People are encouraged to make a contribution.

(Wang & Ahmed 2003)

The learning afforded to people comes not only in the materials and the experience but also permeates *"the conversations"* (Eraut 2012, p. 35). This means people become caught up in a learning process that continuously builds on itself like a rolling *"like a rolling snowball"* (Ni & Sun 2009, p. 1050) focussed on improving performance and practice.

1.17.2 Workplace Socialisation and Integration

Another area which has been impacted by the ever changing market environment has been the effort organisations spend on socialising and integrating newcomers. In this study, the unemployed learners placed for WIL are viewed as newcomers for two reasons. One, learners on a WIL programme and more specifically a Learnership programme must sign an employee contract with the workplace as regulated. Second, the learner is based for at least seventy five percent of the duration of the programme in the workplace and should be seen as an employee of the organisation.

Ardts, et al (The breaking in of new employees: effectiveness of socialisation tactics and personnel instruments 2001, p. 165) report that from an organisational perspective "*every employee is responsible for his or her own career gaining ground*" and that competitive forces have made hiring "*flexible and innovative employees*" critical for the organisation's own "*competitive advantage*" thus most organisations confine their efforts in socialisation to that of "*facilitation*" (Ardts, Jansen & van der Velde 2001, p. 165). But the feasibility of this is called into question by a competing objective of making the newcomer productive as soon as possible (Ardts, Jansen & van der Velde 2001, p. 159; Perrot et al.

2014, p. 248) and developing long-term loyalty to the company (Ardts, Jansen & van der Velde 2001, p. 166).

So as newcomers, entrants into the workplace are encouraged by co-workers to form particular social links, *"professional alliances or friendships"*, that link them to unspoken subcultures – and socialise them into accepting the different groups' values, beliefs and memes – which can then limit the individual's exposure to the rest of the organisation (Eraut, 2006, p. 4). This emphasises the importance of the initial relationships formed in the workplace *"because they establish the quality of the relationship, which in turn affects the newcomers' attitudes, satisfaction, and performance on the job"* (Korte 2010, p. 30).

Similarly Korte (2010) found that newcomers assigned to groups that make an effort to integrate them into the team by *"including them in non-work activities (inclusion), interacting and getting to know them in positive ways (affection)"* and giving them the responsibility to complete meaningful work are able to contribute to the organisation faster than those newcomers allocated to teams who paid no attention to building a relationship with the newcomer (Korte 2010, pp. 39-40). Coetzer (2007) confirms that newcomers or learners in the workplace consider their work colleagues as *"central to their learning experience",* in which colleagues serve as role models, mentors and guides (Coetzer, 2007, p. 431).

According to Karalis (2010) the work done by Wenger and Lave to develop their situated learning theory provides "*a clear perspective on how learning occurs in social conditions and interactions, and how the workplace has a strong educational influence on newcomers*" (Karalis 2010, pp. 18-19) but it also explains a person's "*gradual integration into a community of practice or a professional community*" (Karalis 2010, p. 17). Thus the learning in such social groups is about moving from being an outsider (passive observer) to full participation as an expert or core group member (Casey 2013, p. 49). This is not just a simple process of compliance but one of negotiated competency (Eckart & Wenger 2005, p. 583) that occurs through participation (Handley et al. 2006, p. 643). Where participation shapes both the group and the individual – in that through participation the individual's skill, talent and knowledge can be recognised by the group and through participation the individual can demonstrate their own effectiveness (having the self-efficacy to act and participate) (Wenger 2000, pp. 238-239).

1.17.3 Workplace Interactions

For Hills (2001) the notion of working in teams is part of being human, for him the *"sharing and cooperation"* seen in team work is *"a feature of how we live"* (Hills 2001, p. 7). Hills (2001) describes the learning that occurs through such collaboration as the *"foundation upon which progress is built"* (Hills 2001, p. 9). It is thus not surprising that the first level of cooperation for individuals in the workplace is that of the team (Beus, Jarrett & Taylor 2013, p. 489; Gonzalez-Mulé et al. 2014, p. 988).

1.17.3.1 Teamwork

Coming to agreement about what a team is, is more complicated than the intuitive comfort of working together with someone suggests (Croker, Higgs & Trede 2009, p. 29). From Croker, et al. (2009) and Bhat, et al (2012) a team can be defined as two or more people who share a responsibility for *"a certain task, product or service"* (Bhat et al. 2012, p. 349) and each bring a particular combination of skills, knowledge and experience which together allow them assume particular roles and responsibilities (Croker, Higgs & Trede 2009, p. 37; Boon et al. 2013, pp. 358-359).

Working in a team requires two specific skills, namely:

1. Developing a shared frame of reference, and
2. Learning to work in the presence of others.

(Buchanan & Hucsynski 2004, pp. 359-362)

When people enter the workplace *"they bring with them their own interests, purposes and understandings"* (Watson 2003, p. 80) – they thus need to adjust to the views, purpose and values held by the team (Searle 2006, p. 194) – i.e. the individual needs to be integrated into the team as discussed previously. To an extent, this is determined by their assessment of benefit of joining the team and the levels of collaboration or conflict present in the team.

This section is more interested in looking at how teams learn. Team based learning "*considers how people interact at a practical day-to-day level*" and has a reciprocal relationship with both organisational and individual learning (Hills 2001, p. 69). In that "*organisations can only learn if teams in the organisation learn*" (van Woerkom & Croon 2009, p. 561) and team members learn from each other – thus *"the output of a team is thought to be greater than the sum of the individual outputs of its*

members" (van Woerkom & Croon 2009, p. 561). Although there are many definitions for team learning (Boon et al. 2013, p. 359) this study is interested in the process of how people interact to show progress in their work and increase their own expertise.

Hills (2001) summarises the conditions for learning in the following statement:

> *"For teams to learn there must be motivation to learn, feedback on what is learnt, a source of expertise and a collective sense of achievement".*
>
> (Hills 2001, p. 10)

1.17.3.2 Collaboration

Collaboration refers to *"joint problem solving"* or task completion to *"achieve a shared goal"* where tasks are likely to have limited definition (i.e. they need to be defined by the team) and team members need to still establish a *"shared mental model"* and a "*shared knowledge base"* because the team members are different from one another and cannot assume an "*overlap in knowledge*" (Nissen, Evald & Clarke 2014, pp. 474-475).

In most productive teams there is a balance between cooperation, working alongside each other to complete a task, and collaboration, working together or rather problem-solving together, to meet the team objectives (Nissen, Evald & Clarke 2014, p. 479). The work done by Nissen, et al. (2014, p. 481), shows that through cooperative practices teams observe greater progress, but collaboration ensures better knowledge sharing, thus it becomes important to be clear on what basis the team is collaborating (to show progress and maximise delivery or to share as much knowledge as possible).

1.17.3.3 Conflict

Conflict within a team tends to be centred on tasks or relationships (Kostopoulos & Bozionelos 2011, p. 392). Although task conflict (disagreements on how something needs to be done) is generally believed to be beneficial creativity and process improvement – this is only the case in planning (O'Neill, Allen & Hastings 2013, pp. 251-254; van Woerkom & van Engen 2009, p. 398) .

Van Woerkom and van Engen (2009) find the biggest determinant of team learning to be *"perceived performance"* (van Woerkom & van Engen 2009, p. 398). O'Neil, et al (2013) also found that relationship conflict and process conflict can be, but does not have to be, damaging to team performance – with the largest impact being felt in long-lived teams, not newly formed teams (O'Neill, Allen & Hastings 2013, pp. 251-254).

1.17.3.4 Proactive Work Practices

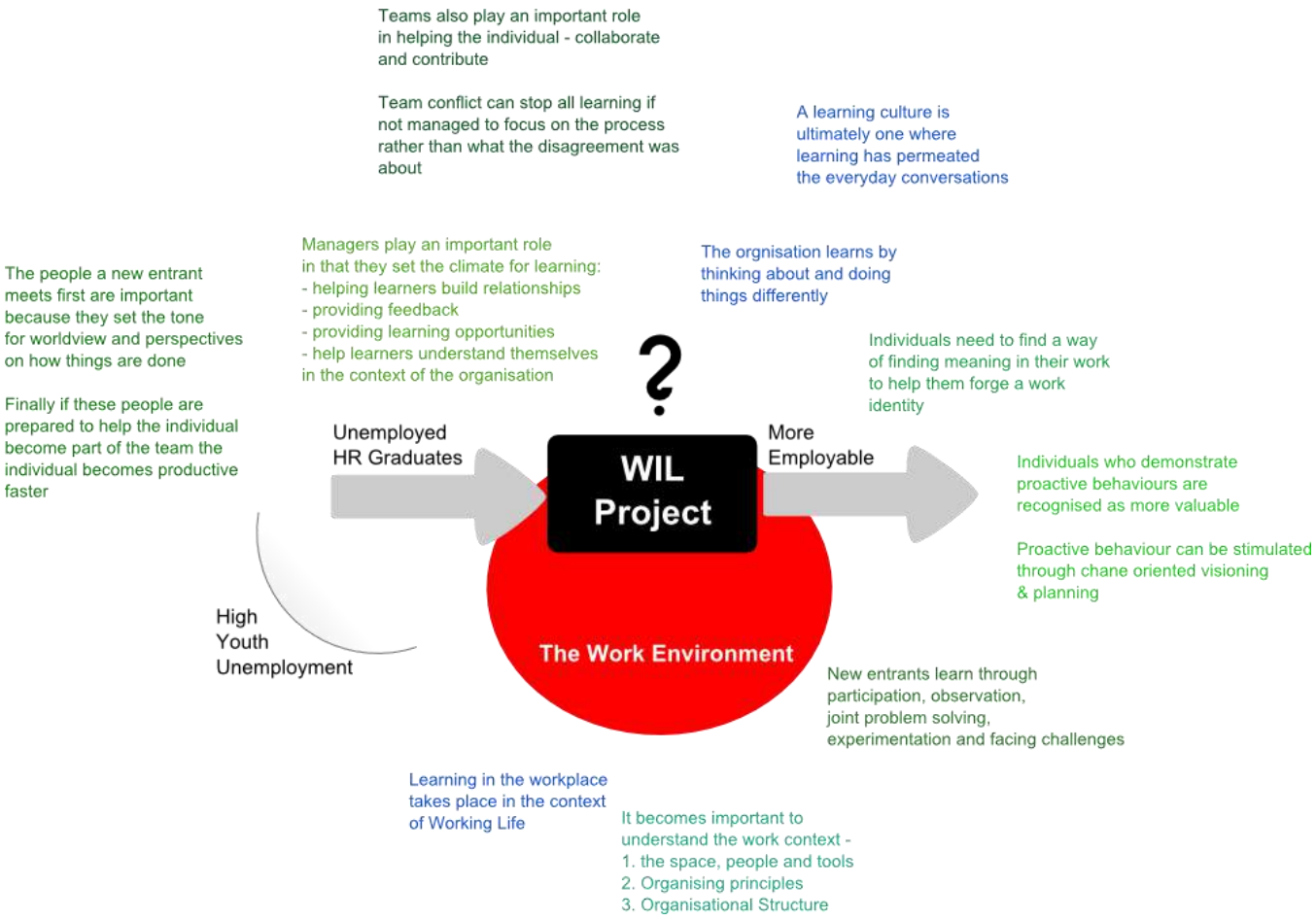
Considerable research has shown that work and career success can be linked to those individuals who engage in proactive work practices (Belschak, Den Hartog & Fay 2010). In fact *"many organisations see proactive behaviour on the part of their employees as crucial for their survival in today's fast-changing business world with its increasingly complex work tasks"* (Belschak & Den Hartog 2010, p. 886).

These individuals are seen to be "*proactively trying to make a difference*" (Belschak & Den Hartog 2010, p. 886) as such they engage in behaviours such as information seeking, looking for feedback on their own task performance, building contacts and social networks inside and outside the company (Cooper-Thomas et al. 2014, p. 318).

Raub (2010, pp. 148-150) believes these behaviours come from an intrinsic predisposition to *"self-starter and future-oriented"* considerations (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010, p. 886). Such individuals will then continuously evaluate or *"assess their current portfolio of skills and competencies against the anticipated needs of future job situations rather than assessing it only in the light of current tasks"* (Raub 2010, p. 150). For Raub (2010) the individual is engaged in a never-ending dynamic revising their own goals, building a network and growing their own skills portfolio. This positive and proactive work orientation develops within the individual a sense of purpose, self-efficacy and enables them to continuously be on the look-out for new opportunity (Raub 2010, pp. 148-150).

Kyndt, et al (2009, p. 369) note that employees need to understand and buy-in to the need for the learning in order them to engage with the learning process and learn. This is consistent with Montani, et al (2014, p. 662) who found that involving employees *"in change-oriented envisioning and planning activities"* actually stimulated more proactive and innovative behaviour.

FIGURE 11: BASIC SCHEMATIC OF THE STUDY – WORKPLACE IN SUMMARY



2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework establishes the language for explaining the observed phenomena and the scope of the research investigation.

The primary gaps in the existing research that this study addresses and the factors that make it unique are:

- Understanding a workplace perspective on the implementation of a work integrated learning project;
- Exploring how – the mechanisms and processes through which – a graduates employability is affected in the workplace;
- Tracking an authentic implementation of WIL, in which the workplace directs exactly how and what practical experience based is provided with each manager allowed to follow their own interpretation of the WIL guidelines;
- Studying and conducting a WIL programme, with unemployed graduates as new entrants in the workplace, to establish a new position.

From the theory and my experience I construct the conceptual framework as a *"scaffold"* (Smyth 2004) for the study providing structure to the inquiry.

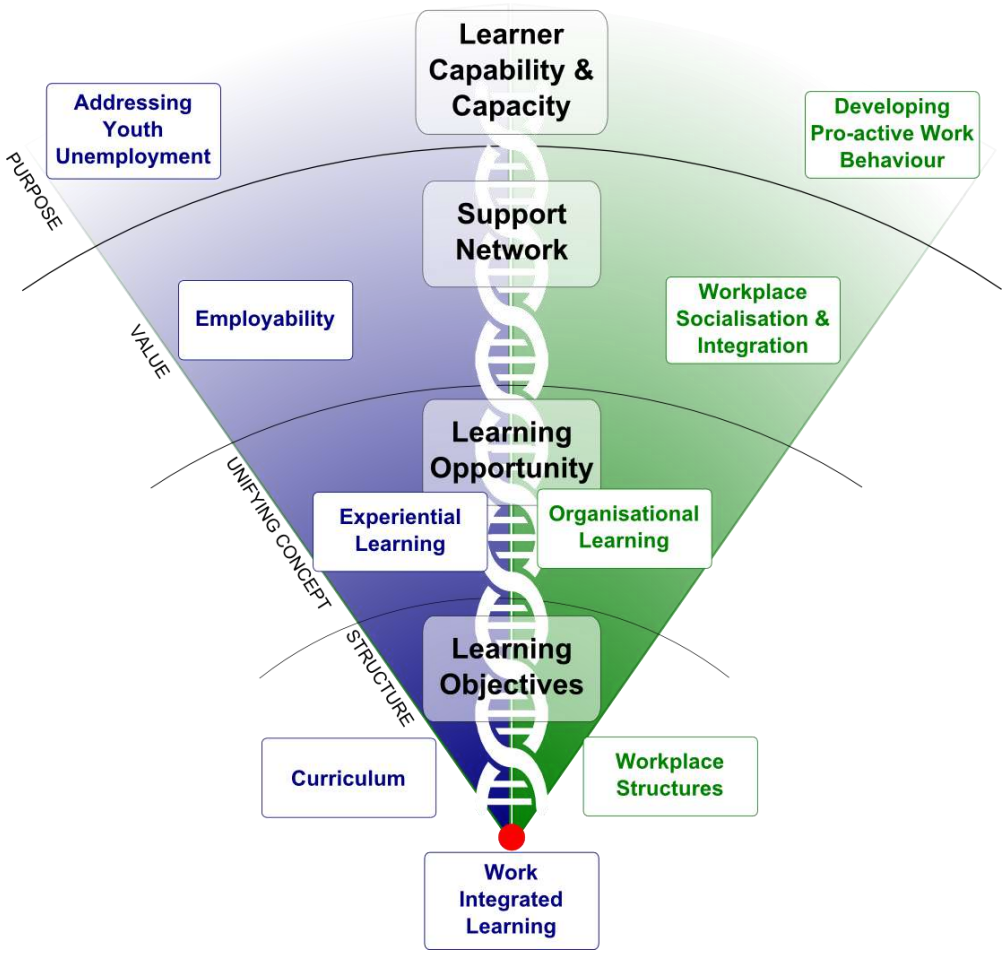
2.1 WIL for Employability: A Holistic Perspective

To develop a holistic perspective on work integrated learning I adopt a systems approach. Firstly, let me stress that "*a multi-disciplinary approach is not a systems approach"* but rather a systems approach is an attempt at "*synthesising separate findings into a coherent whole*" (Gharajedaghi 2011, p. 89).

Recognising Work Integrated Learning as a discipline and the Work Integrated Learning project as "*boundary-maintaining entity or process"* (Laszlo & Krippner 1998, p. 2), I illustrate how the theoretical framework is related to the implementation of the Work Integrated Learning Youth Development Project in Figure 12.

The illustration is a systemic perspective of the theory behind the implementation of the work integrated learning (WIL) Youth Development Project and indicates how the learning from a curriculum perspective on the one hand and the workplace structure on the other come together to create the building blocks for what I term the “DNA of WIL”.

FIGURE 12: A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE WIL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT



The blue area represents the institution and the green area represents the workplace; both come together in an intertwined fashion for the purpose of meeting the learning objectives of the programme, providing the learning opportunity for the learner, hoping that there will be a support network from both

institution and the workplace in order to build the capacity and the capability of the learner progressively.

The work integrated learning project sets the basis for the cooperation between the training institute and the workplace, creating the project structures responsible for its execution. The next building block results from developing a shared understanding (a unifying concept) of what is considered learning and the "*strategies, interactions or interventions*" (Billet 2014, p. 683) that inform the approach the training facilitators and the workplace mentors take to enable learning to create a learning pedagogy. This blends the fundamental nature of the theories of experiential learning and the learning culture and continuous learning imperatives from organisational learning to create a common understanding for the identification of learning opportunities.

To achieve meaning is to create something that all stakeholders can agree holds value. In this project the value of the WIL initiative lay in its potential to impact the learners' employability. These are blended with the need to *fit in* and be accepted into the workplace team (Wegner 2011; Karalis 2010, pp. 17-18) – stemming from socialisation and integration processes in the workplace. The physical way in which this recognition for the workplace "*a social learning space*" (Hart et al. 2013, p. 284) is in the support network that builds (or is built) around the learner.

At the level of setting the programme purpose, this project was conceived to investigate the potential of using a WIL approach to partner with employers to improve a learner's employability. This was seen as a direct way to address the learners' transition into employment and the education mismatch (ILO 2012, p. 24). For the workplace the potential of developing pro-active work behaviour in their future staff opens the potential and prospects for facing an uncertain future (Belschak & Den Hartog 2010, p. 886). All-in-all the two purposes intertwine to create a learner with increased capacity and more flexible capabilities.

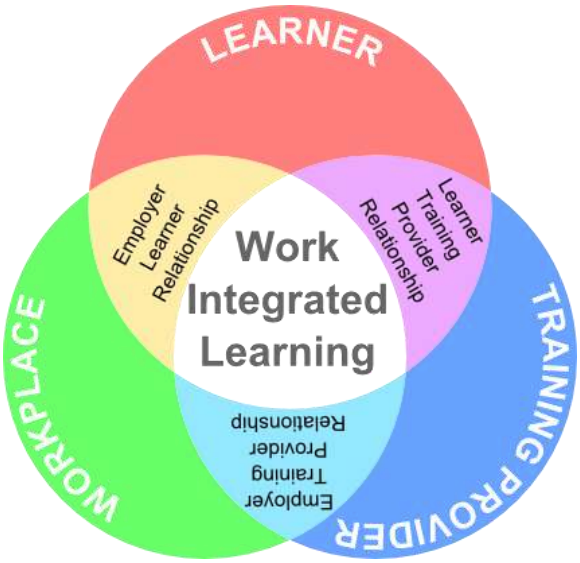
Throughout the project I found myself comparing the observed events to my past experience with other WIL projects. To facilitate and make this comparison more explicit a WIL implementation model was also developed providing a *road map* for the Youth Development WIL project being studied (see **Error! Reference source not found.**, section **Error! Reference source not found.**). The starting point was

to view the complexity of bringing three separate stakeholders, namely, employer, learner and training provider, together into one collaborative partnership each with their own expectations and understanding. In the following section I endeavour to understand each stakeholder, as an element of the whole system, thoroughly and individually so that the influence each may have on the other, during the partnership, can be explored meaningfully.

2.2 The Work Integrated Learning Partnership

This study was undertaken using the learnership model, which is seen as one form of work integrated learning. Learnership agreements are binding contracts signed between the employer, learner and the education and training institution in a tri-partite relationship where learners are employees (Department of Labour 2008). Each partner implementing a WIL programme requires further exploration of the relationships, structures, processes, concerns and meaning of people involved in a particular situation (Ramage & Shipp 2009, pp. 85, 212). Figure 13 illustrates the partnerships necessary for a WIL project.

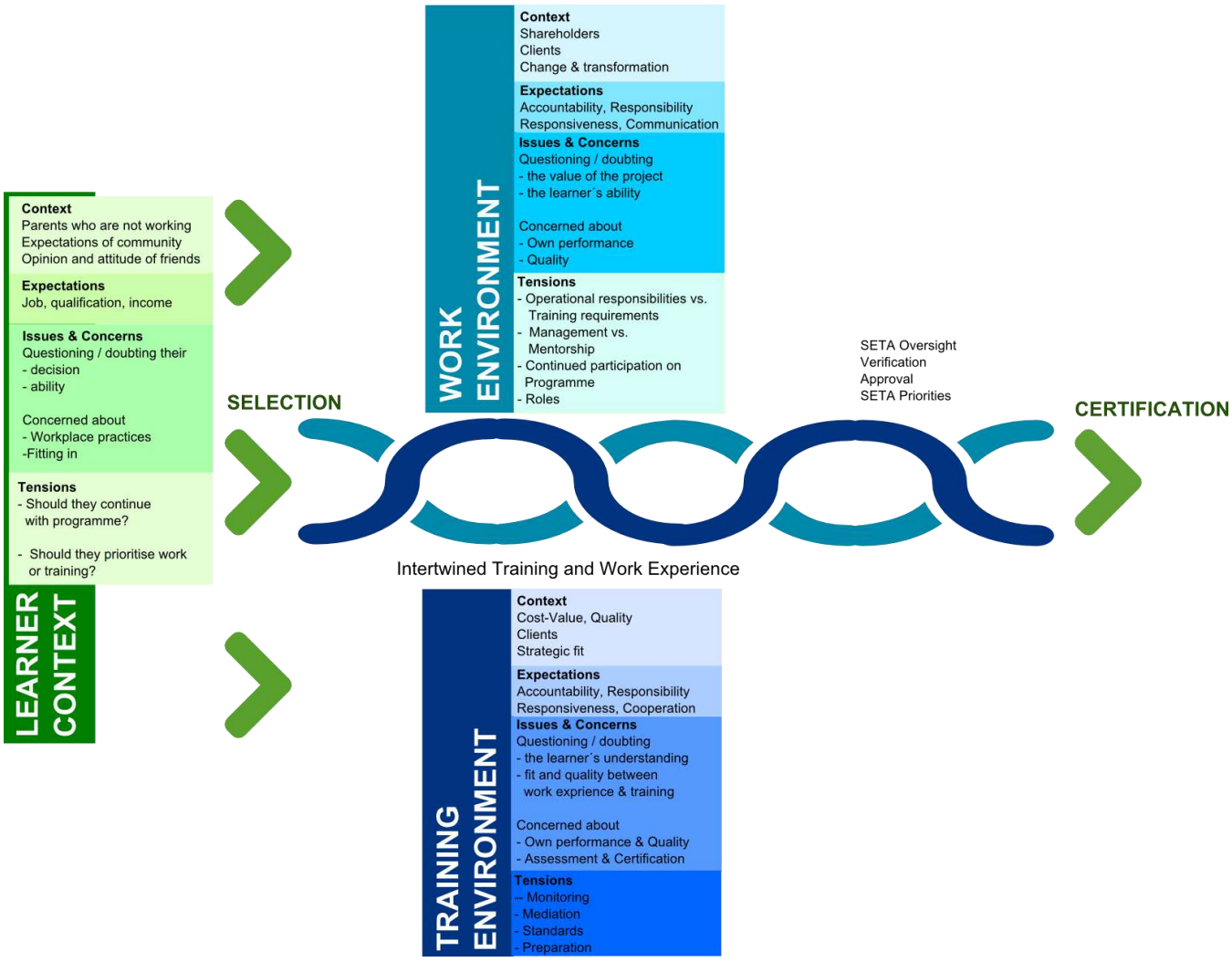
FIGURE 13: PARTNERSHIPS IN A WIL PROGRAMME



Each partner involved has their own unique context which needs to be considered before viewing the tripartite arrangement together. Pertinent to a WIL programme is the relationship between learner and training provider, learner and workplace and training provider and workplace requiring specific roles and responsiblities for each.

To understand the complexity and interactions that define a WIL project in action, I constructed a rich picture: a "*description of an account of the situation as a picture"* (Checkland & Poulter 2010, p. 209). The rich picture (Figure 14) and the discussion thereof draws heavily on my experience implementing and managing work integrated learning programmes.

FIGURE 14: RICH PICTURE OF THE WIL PARTNERSHIP (RAJAB, 2014)



Each partner in the work integrated learning project was carefully considered, noting the possible factors that may have some bearing or influence on another partner. First, the Learner Context explores various scenarios that may possibly exist and indicates the assumptions that are considered. Based on data during the recruiting interviews, a learner chooses to participate in the WIL programme on their expectations to secure an income, gain a work related qualification or even have the expectation of employment through the project. Based on historical qualifications not living up to their expectations, learners may also experience some doubt in their decision to participate. Other doubts and concerns maybe those of fitting in – being accepted or being good enough for the workplace. The learners may

also need to overcome the hesitancy they have at engaging with the workplace because they often have heard negative stories of unreasonable expectations and unfair treatment from people in their communities.

The learners who signed up for the WIL project have been rejected many times when applying for jobs – this may lead to low self-esteem which may impact on their performance in the workplace. The picture also shows that the learners may come from communities that are defined by high unemployment and historical exclusion from education and economic enterprise. This means that they may need to shoulder larger expectations from home and their progress is possibly more closely watched and criticized by the community as a whole.

Unique to a WIL programme is the tension the learner experiences in framing the project as a job or as a training opportunity. Another tension they face is the continual evaluation and re-evaluation of continuing with the programme or dropping out and pursuing other opportunities. Learners sometimes face difficulties after embarking on a course or qualification, face difficulties and decide to drop out or a better more lucrative opportunity to study in another field presents itself placing the learner once again in a position of choice.

In summary, although the picture appears complex, the specific influences, possibilities and perspectives considered that may shape the learner's experience are:

- The learners differing background
- High unemployment rates in the country
- Multiple rejections during job applications
- The learners own expectations and ambitions of getting a qualification, finding a job and earning an income
- Joining the youth development project
- Anxieties of fitting into the workplace
- Not sure what the relationships within the workplace will be like e.g. having an unreasonable boss

The second partner in the WIL project is the workplace. Within the workplace learners are expected to work with co-workers, systems processes and responsibilities in a context which may be unfamiliar to the learner within the context of the organisation. The context of the workplace is usually to ensure that clients are satisfied with the services and products of the organisation. In the case of the two corporate companies participating in the study, the issue of shareholders and transformation to meet legislative requirements are important. Learners build relationships with their manager (and/or mentor). Usually managers are caught up in their own priorities within the workplace, such as managing their own time and availability, deadlines set for themselves and their teams with concerns about their own performance. Managers need to find a way to build systems, maintain quality, accountability and delivery.

The complexity of the interaction between the learner and the workplace is expected to grow since both perspectives maybe diverse. The work environment is typically influenced by both internal and external factors such as business processes, manager personalities and experience of managers as well as time in relation to deadlines.

The level of support workplace managers provide to the WIL programme may be influenced by their understanding and support for corporate priorities. Defining factors will include what the broader organisational performance targets are – how the manager's line manager views the strategic value of the project and how they account for the cost impact the project may have on the company. Managers's at the workplace may expect learners to be accountable, responsible, responsive and able to communicate well as they would do with any new entrant into the organisation.

Tensions that managers need to try and resolve or manage during the project include:

- Balancing their role as manager and their role as mentor
- Evaluating the organisations continued participation and support for the project
- Prioritising and resolving conflicts between the training and workplace requirements

Within the broader context of the WIL programme, the workplace also needs to manage the intertwined nature of training and work experience in a WIL programme requiring a closer interaction with the training project coordinators on issues of scheduling, attendance, monitoring, feedback and follow-up.

The complexity of the WIL partnership is further enhanced when the third partner, the education, training and development (ETD) provider, is introduced into the situation. The ETD provider liaises with both learner and the company or workplace whilst having its own complexities made up of operational priorities as well as external factors which impact on the ETD organisation.

In most instances during a WIL programme, the contact person for the learner in relation to logistic arrangements for work placements is the project coordinator. The pivotal contact point for the WIL project however is the project manager, as this is the person who is responsible for maintaining the client relationship with the workplace. Their responsibilities together are generally focused on achieving the agreed outcomes and deliverables and as such their duties are concerned with managing the time (schedule), cost (in this case mainly people costs) and quality (deliverables) parameters of the project, in addition to managing the team (people) responsible.

Finally, the training provider may also face tensions in the ETD system and need to mediate between varying expectations of the learner, workplace and training facilitator (even conflicts that may arise). The provider also needs to, together with the training facilitator ensure that the programme adheres to the agreed or stipulated quality standards while addressing the work readiness of learners, that is, how prepared learners are at meeting the workplace challenges. The learners' understanding and expectations of their ability to adapt to the workplace may sometimes change during the implementation of the WIL programme.

Given the workplace context of a training company, staff from within the ETD organisation is also aware of their own performance parameters – these trigger concerns about certification (meeting the throughput targets of the company), payment for training completed and demonstrating value to the workplace partner to ensure a long term partnership.

The training facilitator is responsible for training delivery and achieving the associated quality and assessment criteria. On a daily basis the facilitator is concerned with executing their training plan – covering the required material on schedule, ensuring that the learners understand the outcomes and tasks to be completed. Concerns and issues occupying their thinking involve how effective they are at

transferring the knowledge to the learners (whether the learners are getting it) and whether the learners are able to manage the time pressures of completing work and training tasks.

In addition, as mentioned already, this study used a Learnership mode of delivery of the qualification for the WIL project, the roll-out of the WIL programme requires Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) oversight, verification and approval processes which are generally required for quality assurance processes delegated by a Quality Council being the accreditation awarding body. SETA priorities – which in turn are affected by their own support for national priorities at addressing issues of unemployment, skills shortage and transformation, need to be taken into consideration without compromising good governance and accountability practices.

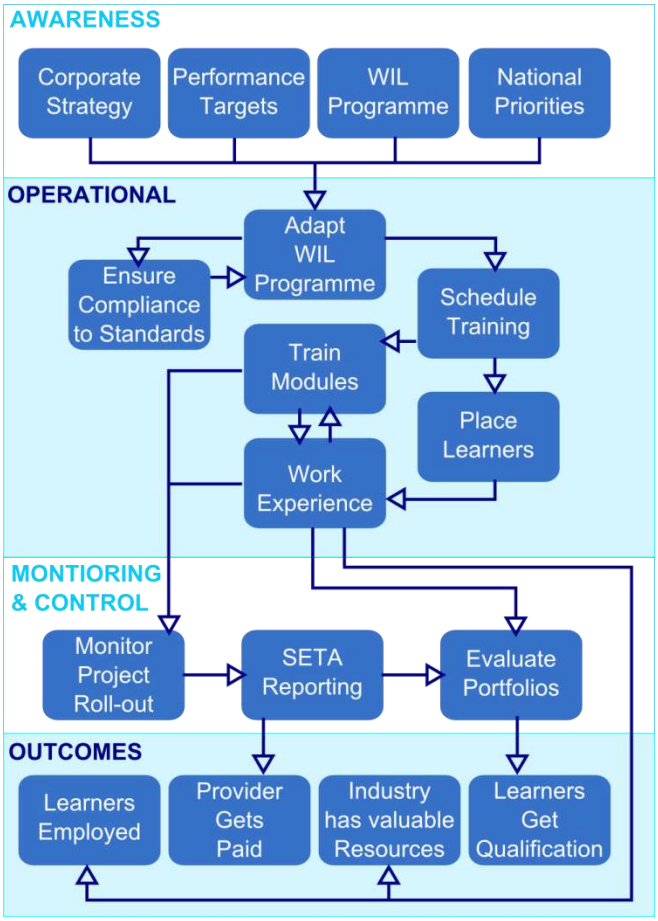
Given that each of the partners have their own context to deal with, the situation is further complicated when all three partners come together during the WIL implementation, to achieve the agreed programme objectives and the unspoken individual goals. The implementation of WIL programme can be seen as bounded by the realities and interactions between the three partners with very different contexts. Figure 14 illustrates the complexity of a WIL project when all three stakeholders come together during implementation.

For purposes of implementing a WIL programme, an implementation model is necessary to ensure that there is a structured approach to WIL as indicated by Cooper et al (2010). The plan specifically takes into consideration the organisational priorities within which WIL is situated.

2.3 The WIL Implementation Model

The WIL implementation model designed for this study indicates the initial phases and activities which require the training provider and the workplace partner to develop a mutual **awareness** of the company's strategic goals and performance targets, the training provider's core WIL programme and the context of appropriate national priorities.

FIGURE 15: BASELINE WIL IMPLEMENTATION MODEL (RAJAB, 2014)



Within the **operational** phase of the project, the project requires the training programme to be customised or adapted in compliance with the agreed standards. From there the project runs through the implementation of the training according to the schedule agreed with the workplace. This requires

the learners to be placed at the various worksites, and the training and work experience modules to be delivered following the agreed schedule.

A work integrated learning project should ideally follow the steps indicated in the baseline implementation model, see **Error! Reference source not found.**, in order to have a positive outcome of learners getting employed. Hence the conceptual model serves as a “road map” for investigating the contribution of the workplace to the employability of learners.

The implementation of the project is **monitored and controlled** to ensure that the project schedules and outcomes are achieved – with third parties such as SETAs or other partners regularly receiving the updates they require. Final control and evaluation of the learning experience comes through the evaluation of the learners’ portfolios of evidence.

If the project is implemented satisfactorily it is envisaged that the partners each achieve the desired outcomes in that the learners gain the qualification associated with the WIL programme, and are employed by the workplace or other industry players. The workplace and their industry gain valuable human resources who have a practical work-ready context to the demands of the workplace and the training provider is rewarded for their efforts by being paid.

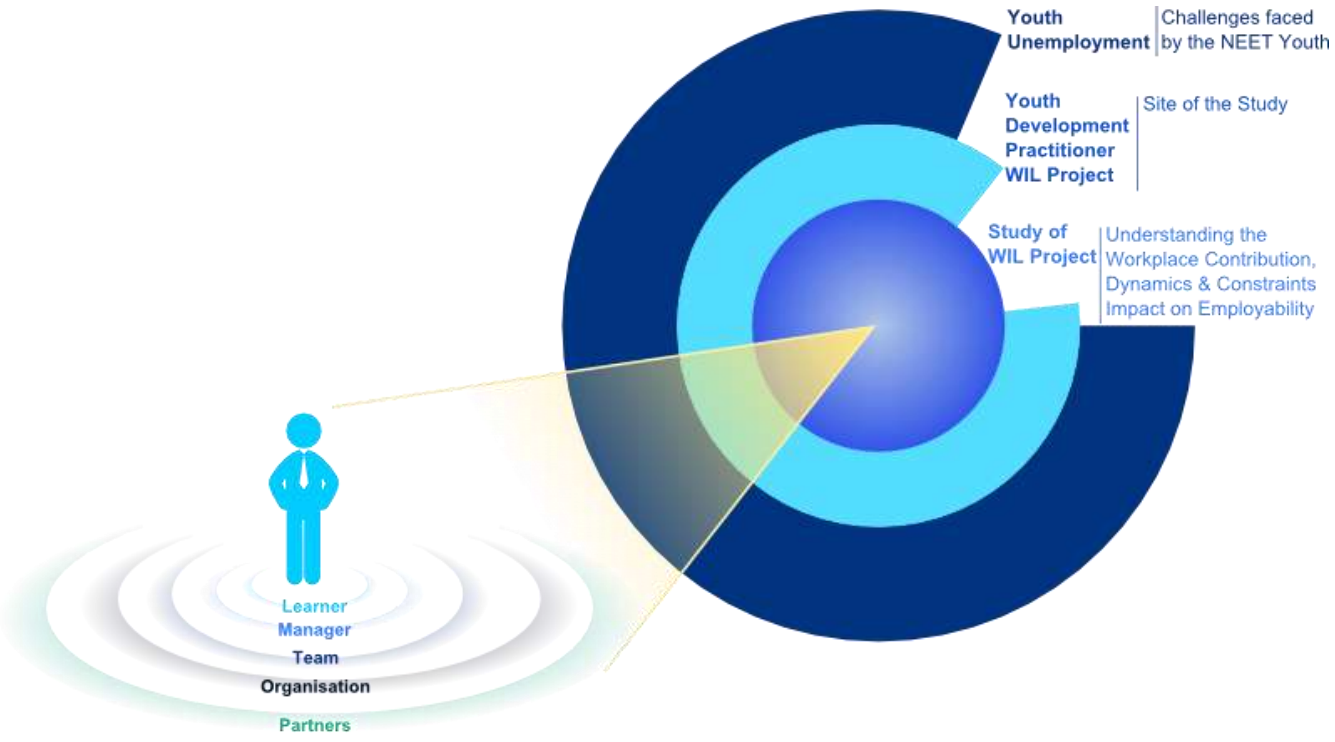
Having understood the complexity of the situation with a broad approach to the problem, I realised that I needed to form precise boundaries for the study. For this study it became clear that an employer perspective and how businesses generally conduct themselves needs to be critically understood since the workplace is the site of learning during work integrated learning. This is confirmed by Bartkus and Higgs (2011) who observes that learning that occurs during work placements have been under-researched. *“Workplaces have their own influences – both internal and external – such as organisation structure, processes, culture, context and behaviour as well as influences of community, industry and government”* Most work integrated learning research has been conducted from the perspective of an educational institution rather than from that of the workplace (Nikolova et al. 2014, p. 1).

The conceptual boundaries reflect the sequence of my thought processes in approaching the study and ensuring that my research questions are well positioned to provide me with the insight that I am looking for leading to developing the conceptual framework.

2.4 The Lens into the Study

The study is placed within the context of youth unemployment and the problem South Africa faces specifically with young individuals not in employment, education or training (NEET). This is indicated as the outer most circle. To investigate the role and contribution the workplace makes in enhancing employability of young unemployed graduates during a work integrated project, it is necessary to put into place a site of study. In this study, the WIL project was based on the Youth Development Practitioner programme as contextualised in the introduction. The study is located in the innermost circle of Figure 16 where the dynamics of the workplace are studied with the learner as the central point of concern.

FIGURE 16: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK (RAJAB, 2014)



Of particular interest to me in investigating the work environment with regard to the contribution of the employer to enhancing employability was the context in which previously unemployed graduates had to learn. Hence, Figure 16 represents the lens through which the research question is investigated. In considering the research question it is difficult not to be struck by the nested relationship (illustrated in Figure 16) between the learner and other influencing factors while gaining workplace learning:

- A personal experience for the **learner**, as he or she reflect on their experiences and stretch their abilities
- A **team** interaction where members of the team influence and support each other
- Extended or constrained by the **manager's** own perspectives and experiences – as he or she are able to open doors to other experiences of help the learner achieve new standards
- The **organisation's** strategic goals and operational processes influence how people within the organisation value and support learning
- Organisational **partners** (including the training partners) extend the organisations capacity, expose the organisation and the learner to other perspectives and experiences

2.5 Understanding the Research Question

Starting with the research question:

> *How does the work environment during a WIL programme contribute to enhancing unemployed graduates' employability?*

I defined four key research clusters that inform the boundaries of the literature survey namely:

1. Youth Unemployment – Establishing what the extent of the crisis is in South Africa. Comparing that to other parts of the world. Identifying current explanations for graduate unemployment. Exploring the challenges that the youth face in finding employment. Reviewing youth and education policies in South Africa to determine what is being done.
2. Employability – Exploring and defining what makes learners employable. The potential processes through which these skills and attributes develop. Probing whether this is something that can be taught or whether it requires hands-on exposure to the workplace.

3. Work Integrated Learning – Understanding the theory behind WIL. Defining WIL. Reviewing different approaches, concerns and learning from past projects.
4. The Work Environment – Diving into the 'black box' that is the work environment. Understanding the relationships, structures and processes that define the work environment. Exploring how individuals learn in a work context and how this learning is translated for the team and others. Identifying how some organisations sustain learning, exploring the barriers to learning and improvement.

One of the greatest challenges I faced in defining my research study was distinguishing between the WIL Study and the WIL project, the centre and innermost circles of Figure 16 – The Conceptual Framework. The similarities in purpose: implementing the YDP Learnership where the learners would go out and help other unemployed youth to transition into apprenticeships and subsequent employment as part of the youth development activities within the HR unit; and conducting the WIL study to a WIL programme as an approach for improving the learners' employability – made it tempting to slip into evaluating the training programme curriculum and the training provider activities. However, developing the conceptual framework helped me clearly delineate that my interest was firstly investigating change in and changes triggered by the workplace (including the manager). Secondly I wanted to track and explain the impact on the learners as participants in the study, using the conceptual framework as a general approach to the study

My focus thus is the learner within the work environment and to understand how learning in an interactive situation takes place, whilst being aware that "*the whole person who learns and ... learning is a life time phenomenon through which the person develops and becomes more experienced*" (Jarvis 2012, p. 111).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Case Study

In investigating the research questions elaborated on previously, the study followed the steps of the Case Study Research Process as defined by (Runeson & Höst 2009, pp. 137-138) with some refinements:

1. *Case study design*: objectives were defined and the case study was planned;
2. *Preparation for data collection*: procedures and protocols for data collection were defined;
3. *Collecting evidence*: The WIL project was executed and the data collected tracking the case under study;
4. *Analysis of collected data*: Data was collated, encoded and analysed;
5. *Reporting*: The collected data was interpreted to uncover particular insights gained from the case study.

3.2 Research Participants

This research study tracked the roll-out of the Youth Development Practitioner work integrated learning project within work sites at two large automotive groups and at an experienced and an accredited private provider specialising in training integrated with workplace experience. This defined the boundaries for the case, in that the study considered only the implementation of a WIL project, and thereby defined the research participants.

TABLE 3: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participants	Description	Interest or Role
Learners	Unemployed graduates, between the ages of 18 and 28, South African citizens, holding a diploma or certificate in Human Resource Management or a related field – interested in working in the Automotive Industry.	The primary beneficiaries of the WIL project, which aimed to develop them into youth development practitioners responsible for project managing the training of apprentices (seen as secondary beneficiaries)
Workplace Managers/ Mentors	Professional managers working with the human resource management and (or) training within two corporates within the Automotive Sector in South Africa	These were the workplace professionals involved in the management of the training of apprentices Principally responsible for managing the development of the Youth Development project learners through providing workplace experience
Training Facilitators	Specialist Trainers specialising in training for learnerships and skills programmes involving a workplace experience component	As trainers they had regular contact with the Youth Development project learners as the various training modules punctuated the learners workplace experience
Project Champion	General Manager of Training and Development within the Imperial Training Group	Responsible for organising sponsorship for the WIL project through the MERSETA. Also interested in understanding how Imperial could go about implementing WIL programmes in the future

3.3 Worksites

Although the description of managers participating in the study, indicate a uniformity of focus in the worksites they were actually quite different as described in Table 4.

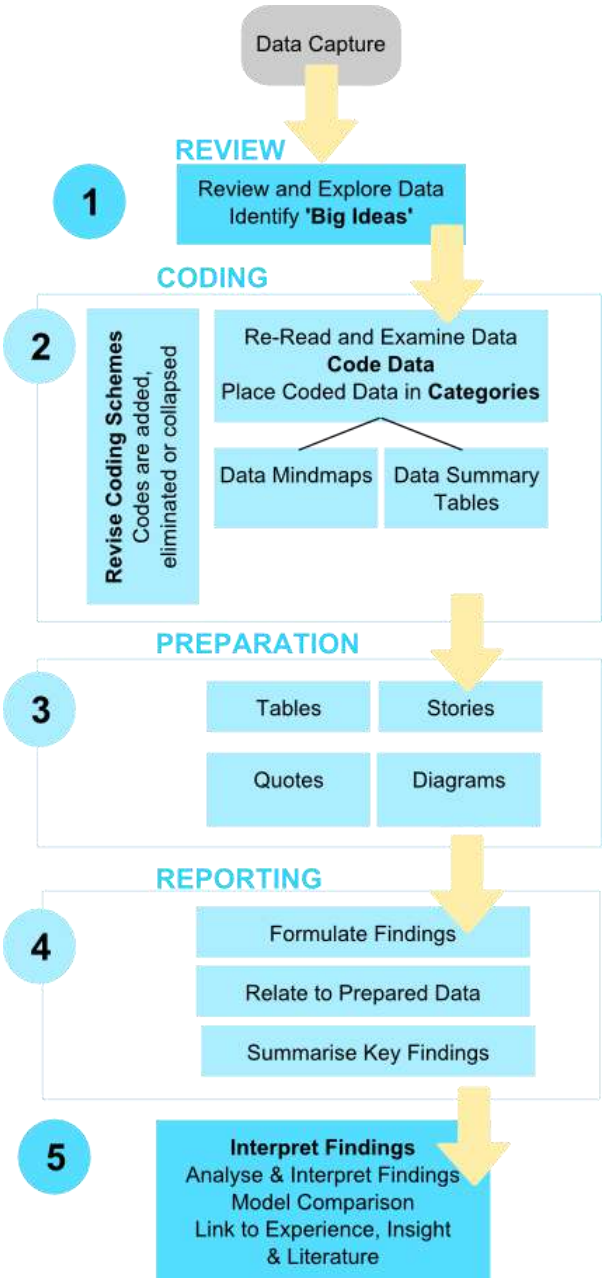
TABLE 4: LIST OF WORKSITES

Worksite	Description	Priorities
1	Franchise dealership and Head office of commercial and luxury vehicles	Manage and coordinate the administration for about 150 apprentices across 18 branches (The SA Mag 2012; Amavula BEE Verification 2012)
2	A recruitment, training and HR services company	Recruit and place apprentices for various automotive clients. Management and customer focused training for automotive groups. (Best Jobs SA n.d.)
3	A brand specific regional training centre	Training centre offering product training for branch staff and training of 113 apprentices (who are rotated through the various dealerships) (Rodin 2014)
4	A logistics training centre	A centralised corporate training academy – offering turnkey training solutions to the logistics industry (including bursary schemes, apprenticeships, skills programmes and learnerships) (TFD n.d.)
5	A petrol training academy	Provides training to artisans and apprentices with an emphasis on Light Vehicle and Auto-electrical trades
6	A diesel training academy	Provides training to artisans and apprentices with an emphasis on Diesel, Motorcycle, Auto-electrical and Forklift trades
7	A group of specialist car retailers	Group HR function responsible for the coordination and administration of training for 98 apprentices across 13 Franchised dealerships
9	A multi-disciplinary automotive technical training academy	An automotive training centre training technicians and apprentices for passenger and commercial vehicles
10	The head office for a car retailer, which is co-located with a flagship dealership	Regional level HR coordination and administration

3.4 Analysis

The data analysis process followed is illustrated in Figure 17.

FIGURE 17: DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS (RAJAB, 2014)



4 FINDINGS

I have been fortunate in that the information provided by the learners and managers left me with an incredibly rich data set. In many ways it was difficult to decide what not to report. I would like to start with the background of the learners as this builds the backdrop for the transformative experience the WIL programme proved for the learners.

4.1 Background of the Learners

4.1.1 Key Observations

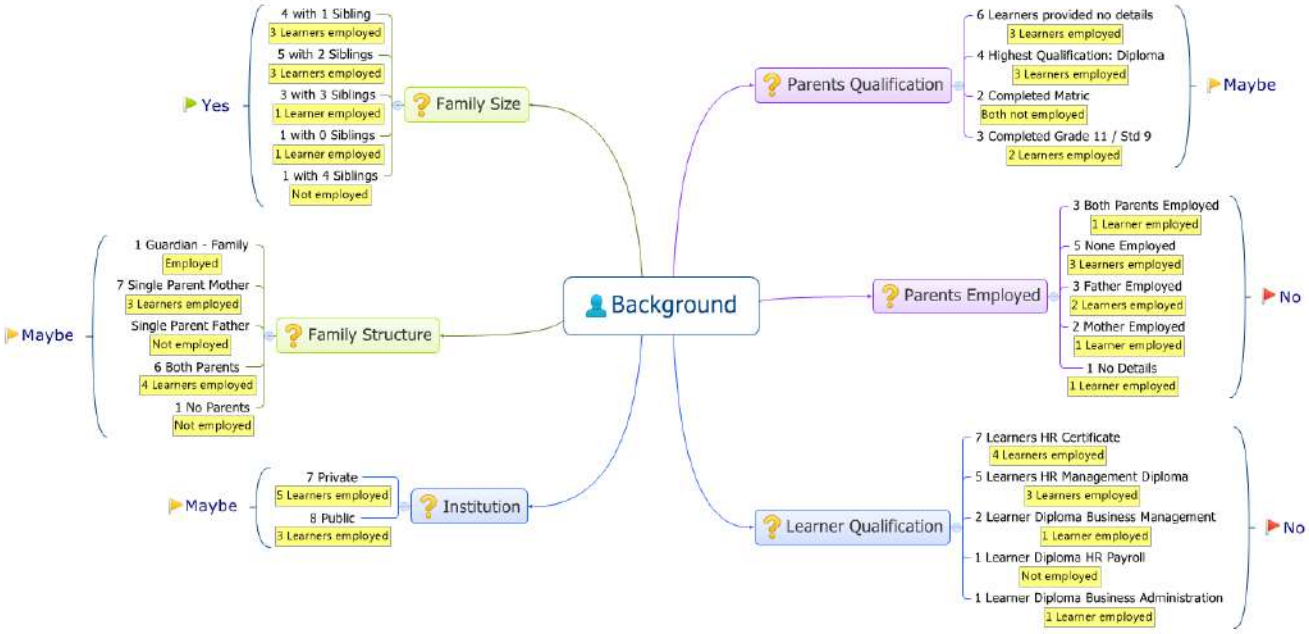
Twenty Learners were recruited mainly from the East Rand (Ekurhuleni) holding either a HR Diploma or an HR certificate. The majority speak Setswana at home. From the background questionnaire, it was established that 6 of the 15 learners live in Tembisa (including Ivory Park and Ebony Park) and this has a bearing of the transport issues they experienced. Two learners had particularly long commutes to work and although they had planned to find accommodation closer to work at the time of being recruited into the WIL project – it seems that other family responsibilities took precedence and they dropped out from the programme in October 2013.

The twenty learners were made up of 12 females and 8 males. Although the learners ranged in age from 21 to 33, the median age was 24. Five learners dropped out all citing personal reasons. Of these one found alternative employment. Learners who completed the project were 5 males and 10 females. Although some of the perspectives from those who dropped out, are considered. The majority of data is reported from the perspective of managers and learners who completed the programme.

In thinking about the background of the learners I consider the themes that are often discussed as offering an advantage to young people:

- Coming from a family where their parents are employed & educated
- Obtaining post school education and training, and the type of institution (avoiding fly-by nights)
- Family size and structure

FIGURE 18: INFLUENCE OF LEARNER BACKGROUND



The results shown in Figure 18, indicate:

- *Does it make a difference if your parents hold a better qualification?* Maybe.
    - 3 of 4 Learners whose parents held a diploma were employed. As opposed to 2 of 3 who completed Grade 11.
- *Does it make a difference if your parents are employed?* No.
    - 60% of those whose parents were not employed secured employment through the project. 60% of those who with one parent employed secured employment through the project. 33% of those with both parents employed secured employment
- *Did the Learner qualification make a difference?* No.
    - 5 of 9 Learners who held a Diploma were employed. 4 of 7 who held an HR Certificate were employed. 1 of 2 Learners who held a Diploma in Business Management and in Certificate in HR was employed. This is different to the findings from Jackson (Testing a model of undergraduate competence in employability skills and its implications for

stakeholders 2014, p. 233) who showed that the more advanced someone's studies the higher their competencies and subsequent employability is rated, however I find like Jackson (Testing a model of undergraduate competence in employability skills and its implications for stakeholders 2014, p. 236) the specific specialisation (choice in major) has no impact in the perceived employability.

- *Did it make a difference if they came from a public or a private institution?* Yes, for this sample.
    - 5 of 7 Learners who attended a Private Institutions were employed, as compared to 3 of 8 Learners who attended Public Institutions. Although the sample is too small to draw any general conclusions from this. This would be consistent with the characterisation of private providers as *"supply-led and user-driven"* (Akoojee 2005, p. 42) making it more relevant or easier to translate to the workplace.
- *Is there a benefit to having both parents at home?* Maybe.
    - Learners who had the support of both parents seemed to fare better (with 66% gaining employment) on than those who came from a single parent household (with 43% gaining employment)
- *Is there a benefit from coming from a smaller family?* Yes.
    - The data seems to indicate an inverse relationship between the probability of being employed and the family size, see Figure 19. But again, the sample is too small to draw a general conclusion in this regard.

FIGURE 19: EMPLOYMENT PROBABILITY VS. NUMBER OF SIBLINGS

The data indicates that ten percent (10%) of (all) learners stated that they have a challenging or unstable family structure – Learner 11, for example, was particularly affected by the length it took for her mother to be diagnosed with Bipolar disorder and Learner 17 struggled to come to terms with the fact that the man her mother was married to is not her father. Assuming that these factors contributed to the learners not being employed and with limited information about the home dynamics, it is difficult to determine without further study, the influence of family structure. The data does show *a benefit in coming from a smaller family.* The data indicates an inverse relationship between the probability of being employed and the family size.

It is important to note that while the study is located within the context of youth unemployment it is not the focus of the study. However, the background of the learners participating in the Youth Development WIL project is of interest to ascertain the reasons for the cohort of learners remaining unemployed despite completing a qualification in Human Resource Development. During recruitment interviews, learners were asked reasons for being unemployed and wanting to be placed on a Learnership. Most believed that the WIL project would give them an opportunity of getting employment.

Sixty five percent (65%) of learners suspended their previous studies due to financial difficulties, switching qualifications (e.g. choosing to do a call centre certificate) or opting to complete an HR related certificate before completing their desired HR Diploma. Three of the learners actually indicated that participating in the YDP Project has motivated them to complete their Diplomas with Learner 4 feeling motivated to move onto completing an HR related degree.

In addition, learners indicate other challenges experienced in their personal lives:

- 25% felt that they needed more career information and were making decisions blindly simply following what their friends said or choosing what was available. This is similar to what Gordon (Doctoral Thesis: Employability and Social Class in the Graduate Labour Market 2013, p. 159) who notes that middle class students are imbedded in *"professional and managerial networks"* that provide a context to their choices which are not available to working class students.
- 20% of learners stated there was a lack of support from family and friends for them studying further - with four learners reporting that their friends actually found it ridiculous that they

were trying to study, as there was no benefit to studying. Gordon (Doctoral Thesis: Employability and Social Class in the Graduate Labour Market 2013, p. 143) notes that individuals who *"move beyond their class* [economic or other] *boundaries"* often disassociate with their background, and feel more isolated than they actually are.

Learner 11's comment of *"I come alone – there is no one to hold your hand"* in many ways is illustrative of how isolated these NEET youth feel from the job market.

4.1.2 Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the background data indicates that there is a need for additional support when working with unemployed graduates:

1. The physical distances and difficulties associated with getting to the workplace need to be taken into consideration by employers when unemployed graduates are placed for workplace experience during WIL.
2. The lack of information and support in deciding what to study, and the impact of peer influence in this regard needs further exploration.
3. The lack of encouragement and support for further study from family and friends indicates that unemployed graduates need a stronger self-drive in order to study further and even enrol in WIL programmes.
4. Unemployed graduates struggle with a lack of support in finding employment.

On analysing the background of learners' parents and their level of education, it is inconclusive as to whether their parent's qualification makes any difference to the employability of unemployed graduates. Further it makes no difference whether unemployed graduates have parents that are employed or not, but data clearly indicated in this study that those learners who were previous qualified from private institutions fared better in gaining employment. However, what does seem to have an effect on the support provided to learners is where learners had both parents as opposed to a single parent at home.

The inconclusive results linking learner background with likely success in the WIL programme (with success being seen as gaining employment after the programme), is surprising, but this phenomenon

probably needs a much greater sample in order to generalise the finding. However, in this project, background of the learners did not seem to be a disadvantage.

4.2 Approaches Taken

Observing the actual provision of work experience during the WIL project, it is possible to identify three distinct approaches taken by the different managers:

- A structured approach,
- A managed but unstructured approach, and
- A learner driven approach.

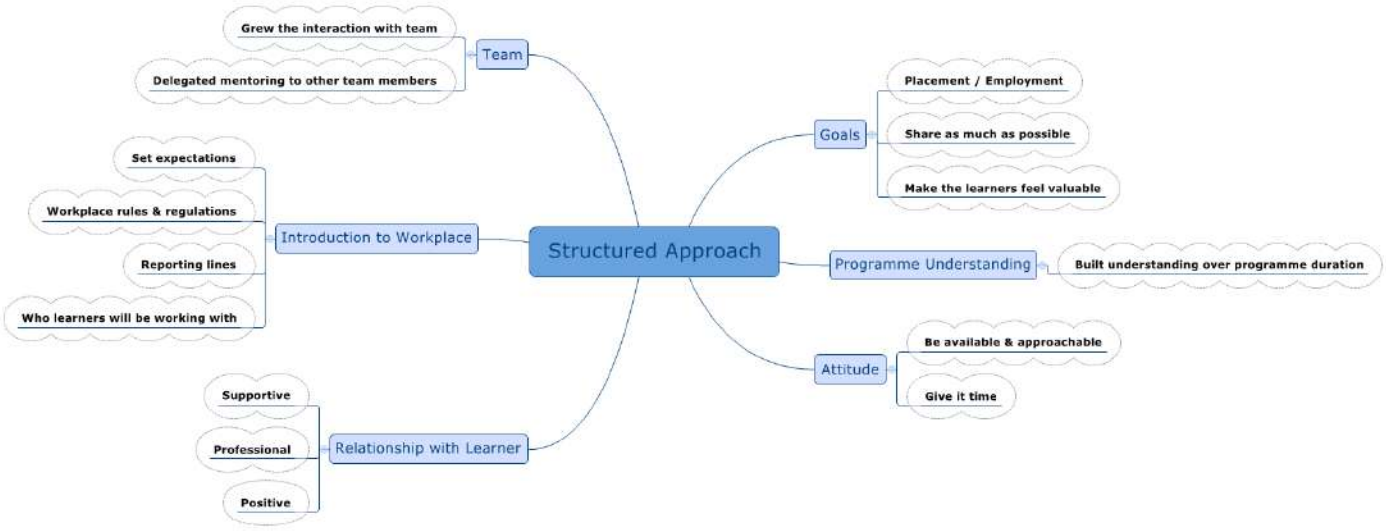
4.2.1 Structured Workplace Approach

Three managers adopted a structured approach to providing the work experience for the YDP programme. Although each manager introduced elements that were specific to their worksite or their particular workplace, Figure 20 represents those that were common to all three sites.

Manager 2 and Manager 7 spent time setting the expectations, explaining the work culture and reporting lines at the beginning of the programme during an introduction to the workplace. Manager 1 became aware that these items needed to be clarified in her interactions with the learners and set and refined targets for a shorter period.

In the structured approach there is considerable overlap between the manager's feedback and the learner's feedback of the experience (common themes for the three sites shown in Figure 21). Particularly Manager 7 built a progression plan in which she exposed learners to more and more, as they completed previous milestones she had agreed with them.

FIGURE 20: STRUCTURED APPROACH TO YDP PROJECT – COMMON THEMES



Manager 7 wanted learners to have a good learning experience; she coached them and ensured that learners had a career pathway so that the project *"will enhance young people's work readiness"*. This is supported by Learner 10 who reports:*"I have learned a lot of things, not just work related but also about life itself and am well prepared for the future and I am ready for all the challenges that I may come across".*

Although Manager 7 was "*excited to be mentoring trainees*" she did not fully understand what the WIL project was about before the learner was placed at her worksite and decided to enquire about the requirements. This was clearly articulated by the manager, as she expressed an interest in most of their classroom activities. "*I extracted what was relevant to the training*" *and* "*got the learners to focus on the deliverables for the Portfolio of Evidence. First and foremost to involve them in the business*" and with that "*remember that they are learners – remember they are there to learn not to work*".

It is evident that Manager 7 considered the integration of the curriculum into the workplace as a vital aspect of work integrated learning and that learners were provided with the opportunity of implementing theory into practice. This is consistent with Smith and Worsfeld (WIL curriculum design and student learning: a structural model of their effects on student satisfaction 2014, p. 1071), as explained in the literature review, that providing learning spaces in line with a structured curriculum and addressing the

agreed learning objectives, produces “employment-ready” learners. Billet and Choy (Learning through work: emerging perspectives and new challenges 2013, p. 271) also confirms that the goals and expectations of students will not be met adequately, unless students can secure adequate experiences and support in workplaces and be given opportunities to integrate them with content in their educational programs.

FIGURE 21: LEARNER EXPERIENCES OF A STRUCTURED APPROACH

Manager 7 could in many ways be described as the ideal WIL workplace manager / mentor. Reflecting on her practices it is clear that she met the key assumptions training institutions make about workplace managers (Patrick et al. 2008, p. 30), namely:

- She demonstrated a high level of commitment and understanding of work placement;
- She had a compatible *"understanding of the skills required and have the capacity to demonstrate these skills"* (Patrick et al. 2008, p. 30); and
- She had a clear vision of what she would consider a *"meaningful placement experience"* (Manager 7), a plan on how to achieve that vision and a clear role for herself.

Manager 2 had planned a progressive rotation through the different divisions of Worksite 2. However found that after the first rotation the learners found a natural fit in the work culture of the two teams and did not rotate them again. Manager 2 claims that it was not practical and convenient to rotate learners due to the relationships built in the workplace and the time that learners take to transition into the workplace. During the feedback session, a similar view was expressed by Ms. N. who worked with Manager 7.

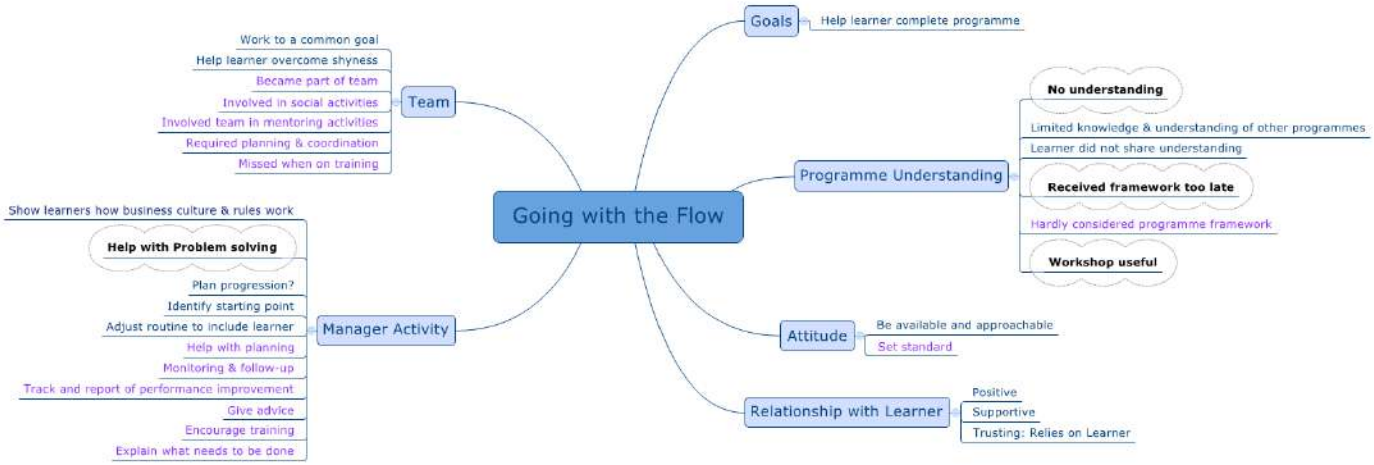
Having a framework for the planned progression of the learners meant that these managers were able to coordinate their own resources more effectively – using team members to manage, monitor or guide the learners through tasks. This they started by including the learners in more informal *"coffee meetings"* to make them feel part of the team.

They also balanced the tasks allocated to the learners to ensure variety in the activities assigned to the learners and track their progress.

4.2.2 Going with the Flow

Both Manager 3 and Manager 8 were oblivious to the programme requirements for most of not the entire project. They relied heavily on the learners to raise a request if they needed any help completing workplace assignments for the course. They however were successful at imparting relevant work experience to the learners by adopting a flexible and adaptive management strategy.

FIGURE 22: GOING WITH THE FLOW MANAGEMENT APPROACH

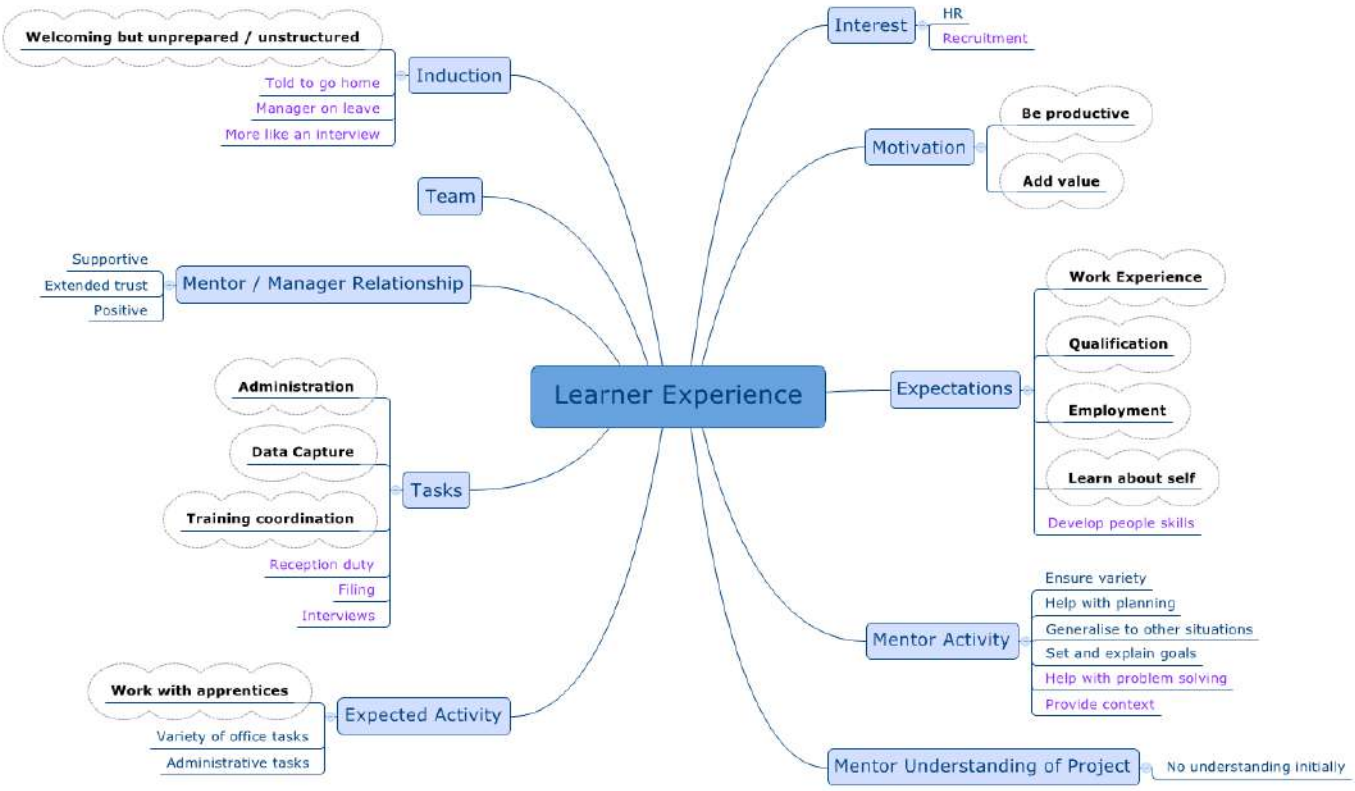


What is striking in reviewing both Manager 3 and Manager 8's approach is the lack of creating a framework in which they operated. In both cases they adopted shorter term planning, in that Manager 3 reported that they *"asked learner to assist the team needed help – the experience was not necessarily linked to the programme objectives – except where the learner made them aware of the portfolio of evidence requirements"*.

This is consistent with Manager 3's primary objective being to create *"understands how we work; who can act as a backup to our team members; who can assist everybody in our team"*. Initially Manager 3 states that Learner 18 was *"juggled within the Department"* with *"no individual person responsible"*. Towards the end of the programme Learner 18's experience became more formalised when the decision was taken to groom her as training coordinator and she was allowed to shadow one of the existing training coordinators who introduced regular planning, feedback and performance monitoring.

Learner 18 responded well to this structure and on reflection Manager 3 and the training coordinator actually felt that the unstructured approach they took initially *"needed more coordination time"* (Manager 3).

FIGURE 23: GOING WITH THE FLOW LEARNER EXPERIENCE



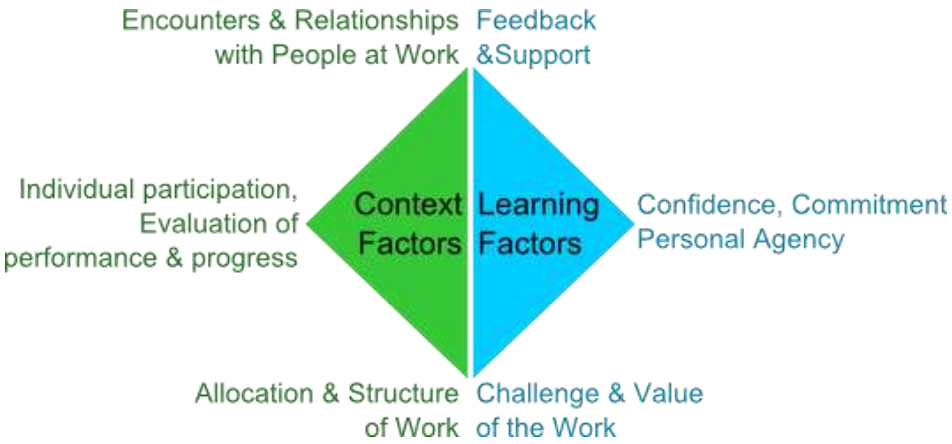
Learner 18 also indicated that for her one of the most important tasks a mentor or manager should engage in was to provide context to the activity from the perspective of:

- *"Why we doing something?"*;
- Providing detail and clarity on "*exactly what needed to be done"*;
- Specifying *"what outcome was expected"*; and
- Linking tasks to a broader organizational context - *"Helped me understand how tasks fit into the bigger picture"*.

This is consistent with the view expressed by Eraut who in looking at how work experience influences learning in the workplace developed the Two Triangle Model of factors affecting learning at work (Eraut

2011, p. 10) adapted in Figure 24 to show how the learning and context factors complement each other.

FIGURE 24: ERAUT TWO TRAINGLE MODEL OF LEARNING AT WORK (ADAPTED FROM ERAUT, 2011, P. 10)



Eraut (Developing a Broader Approach to Professional Learning 2012, pp. 28-29) who notes that managers improve the learning experiences of novices, when:

- They increase the number of opportunities for learners to *"consult with and work alongside others";* and
- Provide support and feedback, especially quick feedback (soon after the work is done) and *"feedback on progress, strengths and weaknesses, and meeting organisational expectations"*.

The learners did not identify feedback and support as critical to their success when it was provided. But, for those learners who received dismissive feedback (42.9% of those who were not employed) or received limited feedback (28.6% of those who were not employed) supportive feedback was described as critical.

Similarly for Learner 16 one of the key detractors for the workplace experience was the repetitive nature of the tasks: *"duties started to be repetitive whereby you are doing the same things every week"*, which then made it difficult for him to maintain his motivation. For others, like Learner 13 and Learner

17, they were able to break the monotony or limited tasks they were given by helping out in other departments demonstrating a sense of personal agency and motivation.

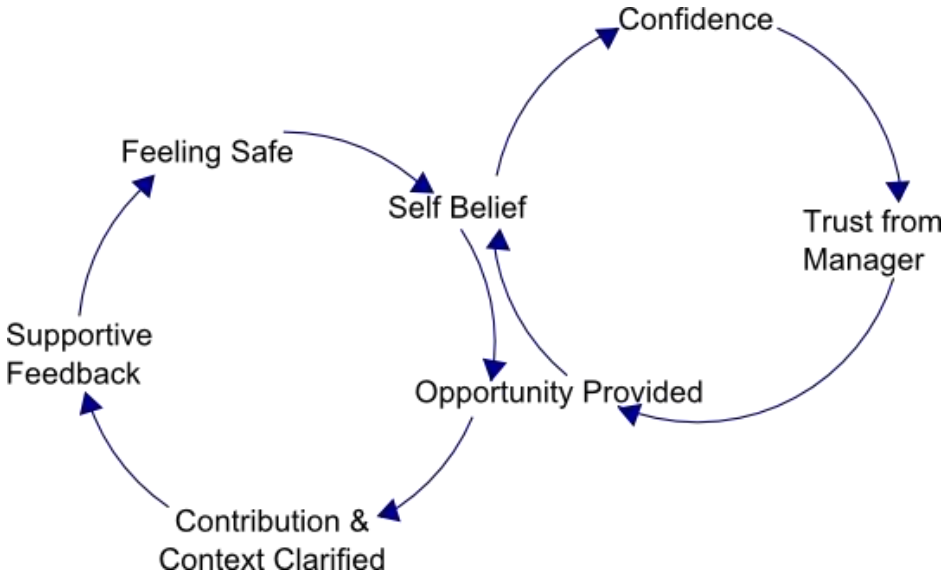
4.2.3 Leaving it to the Learner

Worksite 1 and Worksite 10 were the prime examples where the managers stepped back from the programme entirely leaving it up to the learner to find their own way in the workplace. At these sites the learners needed to tap into their personal agency to ensure that their portfolio tasks were completed. This they did by building a support network that extended beyond the reporting line. In both cases the learners experience indicates an *ah-ha moment* where the learners decide that this is an opportunity for them to prove themselves for Learner 17 (at Worksite 10) this comes when the assistant leaves, *"when the assistant left it created an opportunity for me to prove myself",* and she is then asked to work over the Christmas holidays; for Learner 13 (at Worksite 1) this comes after the manager, her assistant and a temporary assistant leave and a new manager joins, for Learner 13 the amount of learning she got is directly related to the number of people she got to know, *"I started knowing people and getting in as much work as I should and recently I got to know the new boss which I like most and learning as much as I possibly can recently".*

FIGURE 25: LEARNER 13'S ILLUSTRATION OF HER EXPERIENCE

Eraut (2012, p. 26) identifies that a learners personal agency is affected by the confidence, they have, and motivation, they receive. He highlights that critically confidence has to come from within a belief that they can do the work and make a contribution. For Learner 13 this initial confidence building and support came from two other managers within Worksite, particularly the financial manager made an impact in that he *"welcomed me, supported me, made me feel safe and encouraged me to stick with it",* with this self-belief and support initiated the Manager 10 was able to join and increase Learner 13's motivation by providing *"an orientation towards outcomes for clients and the work group and professionalism in the sense of pride in a job well done"* (Eraut 2012, p. 26).

FIGURE 26: FEELING SAFE - CONFIDENCE -TRUST- PERFORMANCE



Looking more closely at Learner 13's experience the start of a productive learning experience is a sense of security or feeling safe and welcome. This allows the learner through interaction in the supportive environment to develop a self-belief about being able to do the job. If at this point they are afforded an opportunity to contribute – and the contribution is positioned properly with respect to the value it holds for the learner, the team, the company – the learner motivation grows to complete the task. On completion of the task if the learners' performance is then evaluated objectively and constructive and supportive feedback is provided their sense of security and self-belief grows further. The increased self-belief surfaces as an increased confidence and positive attitude towards work (*"wanting to come to work"*) which encourages the manager to provide the learner with more opportunities, which is a positive motivator & increases the learner's self-belief and confidence even further.

4.2.4 Evaluation of the Approaches

To really understand what each of the different approaches has to offer, it is important to understand the impact of each on employability. Hence, each approach is assessed in terms of the outcome

achieved, the perceived employability of the learners as assessed by the managers and the learners, and is presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5: ASSESSMENT OF THE APPROACH OUTCOMES

Approach	Outcome	Perceived Employability (Managers)	Perceived Employability (Learners)
Structure	4 of 6 learner employed	Benefits raised by the managers: • More skills • More experience • More confident • Team work • Able to demonstrate value add they bring • More job options • More professional • More open to doing something new	Benefits raised by the learners: • More skills • More experience • More confident • More professional • Better communication • Clearer thinking • Practical understanding of what to do • Trust own abilities • Able to speak up and represent others • Appreciate the diversity & complexity of the workplace • Able to find information & help
Going with the Flow (unstructured but managed)	2 of 2 learners employed	Benefits raised by the managers: • More skills • More experience • More job options • More confident • Able to demonstrate value add they bring • Accountable & reliable	Benefits raised by the learners: • More skills • More experience • Accountable & reliable • More confident • More open to new experiences • More professional • Better communication abilities • More appreciative of diversity

Approach	Outcome	Perceived Employability (Managers)	Perceived Employability (Learners)
Leaving it to the Learner	2 of 2 learners employed (although only 1 permanently)	**Learner 17**'s manager declined to comment but a colleague commented "*Learner 17's shoes are hard to fill, she is keen to work and ready to help at anything and she fits right in*" **Learner 13**'s manager declined to comment	**Learner 13** summarises why she feels more employable: *"I feel more confident and in control of my own career path"* Stronger CV & skills **Learner 17** echoes this but adds: *"I was able to demonstrate to myself that I am able to complete even unfamiliar tasks"*

Note to the table: The learners not shown in the analysis include Learner 16 – who experienced a management approach oscillating between *Going with the Flow* and *Leaving it to the Learner*, at the close of the programme he indicated that he wanted to build on his learning and start his own business which he has subsequently done. The remaining learners were placed at a worksite which withdrew from the project in December 2013. Also both Manager 2 and Manager 7 indicated that they would employ the learners if they had the authority or headcount. It should be noted that the Learners from Worksite 7 (Manager 7) have both found employment elsewhere.

The **structured approach** offers three key advantages in that:

- Expectations, goals and targets are continually managed (set, revised and evaluated) which ensures that learner, managers and team members are all working towards the same goal in a similar manner. This is particularly evident from Manager 7's team where the manager and learners make similar observations and raise similar issues;
- Managers adopting a structured approach are able to evaluate their own worksites to see whether they can accommodate the programme or need to involve partner worksites to complete a rounded experience;

- Managers adopting a structured approach find it easier to delegate some of the responsibility to their team, although as noted by Manager 2 supporting a WIL programme is still time intensive on the manager, even if they delegate.

The key disadvantages of a structured approach are that:

- It becomes difficult to balance work responsibilities and the programme responsibilities, especially as the learners grow in their workplace proficiency – their workload at work grows;
- Using a structured approach builds on the managers knowledge of the work processes, culture and value of the organisation and if their understanding of such is inflexible or incomplete it makes it difficult for the learner to find a way of contributing.

Going with the Flow offers the following advantages;

- The learner gets groomed to fit into a particular team and environment, resulting in a stronger relationship between the manager and the learner – increasing the possibility of employment at the end;
- Learners by the nature of how the work is allocated get to know the team and also are exposed to a variety of tasks;
- Learners are seen as employees sooner.

The key disadvantages of going with the flow are:

- The learner has no reference point and spends much of their work in a reactive mode;
- There is little motivation or support for the learner to complete the training requirements and the learners may not be given all the opportunity to gain the required work experience;
- This approach is very relationship driven and if the learner and manager or team cannot reach agreement on the goals it is likely that the learner will become isolated (as is seen in part by Learner 16).

Leaving it to the Learner offers the following advantages

- All responsibility lies with the learner so that there is little overhead for the individual manager;
- The learner is able to demonstrate their flexibility, commitment and drive.

The disadvantages are:

- There is no way for the learner to integrate properly into the workplace;
- The learner remains at risk of not having work to do or doing something incorrectly;
- There is no way to assess the growth in the organisational context because most task allocations are ad hoc.

In addition, it has to be noted that the structured approach and going with the flow approach work well as long as learner and managers share a similar understanding and expectation of the project. In these cases they can normally agree on or develop a mutual understanding of what would make the learner employable over time.

In cases where learners and managers are not able to reach agreement it becomes difficult for both manager and the learner to remain engaged and motivated. The Leaving it to the Learner Approach however demonstrates that the learner may still develop their own employability in such cases but it requires self-motivation and flexibility from the learner.

Across all three opportunities connecting with someone who has a keen understanding of the company, its functions and people enhances the quality of the work experience.

Finally all approaches become more meaningful for the learner if their activities are placed in context, monitored, someone engages with them in a reflective practice of thinking about how they completed the work and provides constructive and supportive feedback for improvement.

4.2.5 Concluding Remarks

What became apparent across all three approaches was that it was necessary for the learners to be accepted into the workplace as part of the team. That is they needed to be integrated and socialised into the workplace for their work experience to be a success. This was done by linking the learners to multiple teams and not keeping them isolated within the HR related divisions.

The structured approach led to more predictable success when it came to achieving the curriculum objectives but even in these cases there was a need to accommodate the specific worksite practices

and routines. Thus there is a need for flexibility and adaptability in the work experience requirements of the WIL curricula.

4.3 Out of Step – Disruptive Practices and Mishaps

The work experience and support for learning were further influenced by other factors in the work environment. Although a supportive and structured approach helped the learner's development there were also factors that impeded their development.

4.3.1 Different Expectations

Before exploring the ways in which a WIL project can be frustrated by work practices and the realities of transitioning between a work- and a training- environment – it is important to discuss the situation when learner and manager are not in agreement about the goals, objectives and activities of the WIL project.

Differences in expectations come from:

- Framing the WIL Project differently. Contrasting the way that Manager 2 describes the project, namely: *"some HR learners will be joining us. Knew they had no work experience. That they would be completing something like an apprenticeship and that we would need to be tolerant"* to the way Manager 8 framed the project: *"the learner was introduced as being a helping hand to do whatever was necessary to help"* immediately highlights how important the initial communication and contact the managers have to the project as this sets the tone from which they plan their interaction and management of the learners.
- Different understanding of the workplace – how it operates and its role in the WIL programme – as observed by the Manager 9 in Worksite 5. He notes that some learners: *"had a different understanding and expectation of what the workplace was going to be about and what they would be doing and that this meant that they were very frustrated"*. Adjusting and accommodating such differences required extra energy and motivation from the learners which as Manager 9 notes that some learners were unable to do: *"unable to tap into their own motivation and overcome this inertia that had set in".* Learner 16 struggled to adjust to the training centre at Worksite 5 managing training on a project-by-project basis as opposed to having a traditional semester structure as he had expected.

- Different expectation of the processes through which the workplace would support the WIL project. Learner 19 reflects that struggled to adjust to the work environment because the interactions are different to those he expected*: "I expected the workplace to act more like teachers / and provide a constant mentor. Develop an in-depth understanding of corporate functions with a focus on HR".*
- Different sequencing and timing expectations. Overwhelmingly eighty percent (80%) of the learners who completed the project and gained the certificate felt that if they were to repeat the programme they would want greater correlation between the workplace tasks and the timing of specific training modules. Manager 2 felt that some of the tasks came at a "*bad time*". This means is it important to match the tasks required in the curriculum to those available in the workplace, the timing and sequencing of the tasks.

Billet and Choy (2013, p. 271) believe that "*clarifying expectations about purposes of, support in and responsibilities of parties in workplaces is important*". If these expectations of what the learner could or could not do in the workplace where explicit, it may have avoided much tension during the WIL project. It may also mean that good preparation of workplaces to meet the needs of the programme is vital. The study also indicates a need for tracking this mutual understanding and adjusting to the changing requirements and insight of the workplace. Manager 1 demonstrated this subtle adjustment and synchronisation with the training provider through regular updates about the learner's progress and task allocation.

Yap (2012, p. 135) notes that it is equally important to prepare the students for the workplace to avoid *"disenfranchising local firms"* in that as firms participate in more WIL projects they really expect students to be prepared for their environment specifically. Manager 9 talks about expecting candidates that were "*more work ready*" and *"not being sure what they could do"* this clarity on the learner's capability and how they could be deployed seems important to maintain stability in the workplace. Manager 7 adjusted her plans to include assessments of the learners' capabilities and adjusted her plans accordingly.

As far as reaching agreement on the processes through which learning is supported in the workplace, it is important to recognise that learning is advanced differently, as observed by Moore (Work-based

learning and the Role of Managers 2010, p. 27) *"traditional learning is content driven"* and *"work-based learning is inquiry based"*. In general learners expected the work experience to be more organised and to link to the training more clearly (Learner 14**.**). Particularly the youth struggle with this transition as they tend to view workplace managers as *"pseudo-teachers with responsibility to provide correct answers to all business problems and ensure all needs are met in the individual's desired career progression"* (Schofield & Honoré 2011, p. 112)

So while the education and training institution may have made the programme objectives clear, as in this case, with a framework document indicating the alignment of programme outcomes linked to workplace tasks and activities, Billet and Choy (2013, p. 272) suggest that students need to be prepared for "*unpleasant, confronting and unhelpful experiences*" and a close relationship between the workplace and the institution would assist in developing a better understanding and *"shared outcomes*". However, it is clear that while the focus of preparing learners for the workplace has been well defined and researched, there has been very little insight into preparation of the workplace for work integrated learning (Smith et al. 2009, p. 10; Helyer & Lee 2014, p. 349; Harvey 2003, p. 5). Yet Moore (2010, p. 27) shows how important preparation is because managers easily slip from encouraging learning to disabling work-based learning by adopting a "*didactic, defensive*" and unsupportive approach. Hence, while an induction process may be considered a good option to enable learners to understand the requirements of the workplace, according to Harvey (2003, p. 6) "*employers rarely have the time for a leisurely induction process".*

Workplaces need to be capacitated on what work integrated learning means, and what institutions would like to see take place with regard to programme integration with real world experience. At the same time institutions need to understand what is important to the workplace so that both parties can work together to produce more flexible and work appropriate education for the learner. It cannot be assumed that when partnership agreements are signed between institutions and workplaces, that both organisations are capable of good implementation without being sufficiently prepared to manage the programme, manage the learner and manage challenges arising from work integrated learning. Divergent expectations give rise to various implications.

As if to draw attention to the differences in expectation the initial reception and preparation of the workplace for the learner set the tone for many learners experience of the workplace. So twenty percent (20%) of learners expected their own space and computer at work on arrival and not after the WIL project was underway and forty percent (40%) of the learners felt the workplace was unprepared for their arrival. The way the workplace manager excused or dealt with this challenge critically influenced the attitude that the learners adopted for the programme. An exception to this was Learner 4 who was moved from one worksite to another which she later describes in her reflective diary as having many *"first days at work"*, starting each time with new hope and openness.

4.3.2 Lack of Communication

One of the most striking findings was that only two (2) of the managers interviewed found it necessary to communicate their goals and expectations to the learners, even though sixty-two and a half percent (62.5%) indicated they set goals based on work responsibilities. This could explain why twenty-six percent (26%) of the learners want more information and thirty-three percent (33%) are calling for more formalised processes in which learners and managers are made aware of the outcomes, activities and processes in a joint orientation. Learner 8 describes the cycle in the following way: *"too many people allocated their tasks to us, and not being supportive in helping us figure out what needed to be done or how. Then when we did it incorrectly or if something went wrong people would transfer all the responsibility to us – making us the only ones to blame."*

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the managers felt that there was a need for more timely communication, feeling like they had no opportunity to plan but were rushing to accommodate last minute requests. This in particular comes from an assumption, made by thirty seven and a half percent (37.5%) of managers, which was not made clear to the learners that they would take the initiative in the training and overtly request any help and assistance they needed to complete the training programme work experience requirements.

In some cases, as reported by Learner 19: *"we were not allowed time to complete the course requirements. The key responsibilities in terms of the programme were totally neglected"*. Or as with Learner 18 the impact of the management approach adopted meant that the course requirements were

left *"to the last minute".* Trainer 2 noted that the learners were requesting extra time to complete the tasks required by the curriculum.

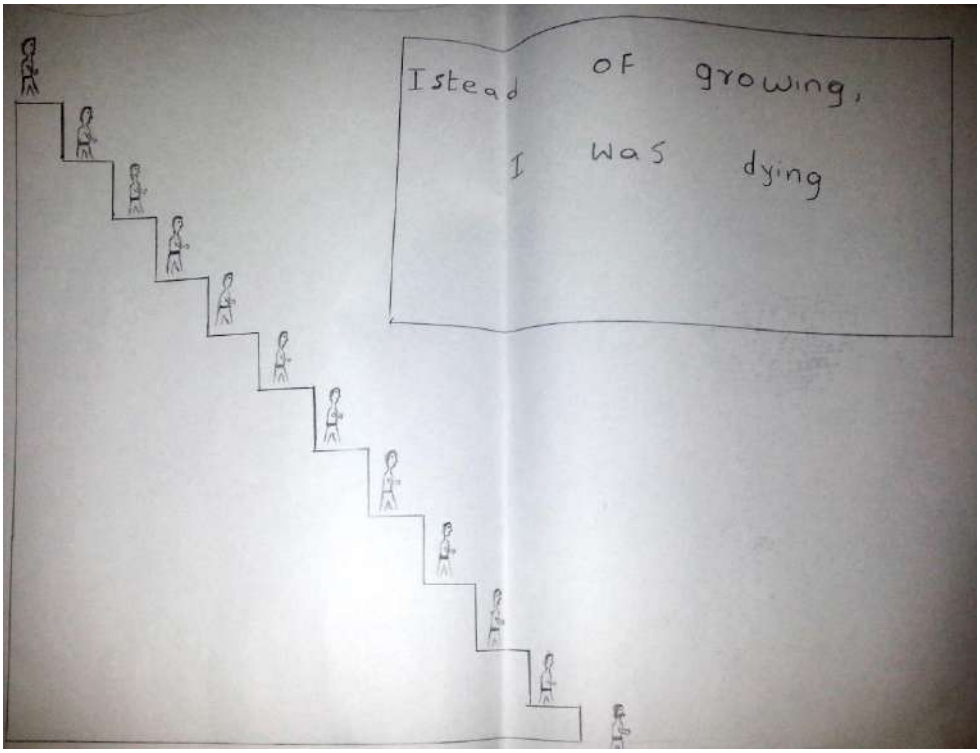
Again, this raises the necessity to prepare the Learners for different practices in the workplace and to capacitate the workplace to support the learners in a more constructive way. Rumboll and Duarte (2011) suggest that it is not so much about providing information but rather engaging managers and learners in the learning processes. This requires exposing all stakeholders *to "ways of thinking and doing outside"* their "*own discipline of interest or study, and the entailed importance of lifelong learning in order for curiosity to be stimulated"* and thereby gaining their attention (Rumboll & Duarte 2011, p. 171)

4.3.3 Isolating – Non-inclusive Practices

The importance of establishing solid and supportive relationships in the workplace has already been discussed in reviewing the approaches to managing a WIL project in the workplace, but what if this does not happen?

Learner 19 reports how a group of learners were asked to share a single computer and that they then accessed using personal access codes. The learners were however never provided with access to the corporate communication channels and hence when the access codes were being changed they missed the notification. From the learner's perspective: *"the access codes were changed without notification"* (Learner 19) and this on top of the learners feeling that they *"were not really … to go out the storeroom"* (Learner 5). Left them feeling very alone and isolated in the workplace. Learner 8 illustrates this feeling as being stuck behind a thick wall on the outside looking in. Learner 19 represents it as if he is descending an interminably long flight of stairs into a dungeon.

FIGURE 27: LEARNER 19'S ILLUSTRATION OF HIS EXPERIENCE



This isolation was further increased when learners were repeatedly told by the workplace managers and mentors that *"they were doing"* the Project champion "*a favour. This made us feel like we were not important and they did not want us or care about us"*

These practices are in stark contrast to those employed by Manager 7 who wanted the Learners to have access to as much corporate communication as possible so that they could explore the different possibilities the workplace had to offer them.

Fundamentally, the experiences described by a few learners and a manager indicate that the project has done very little to enhance their skills or employability and is consistent with the work done by Kersh and Evans (2006) relating to how recognition of work experience helps people transition between various work environments. In Kersh and Evan's model (Kersh & Evans 2006, pp. 107-111), learning in the workplace is keenly influenced by the recognition of someone's skill and knowledge and the level of

engagement of the individual. Specific factors identified that influence the outcomes of workplace based learning are:

- The recognition of skills as valuable: firstly by the learner and then by others
- The deployment of the skills: the extent to which they are used in the workplace
- The learning environment: how supportive and how expansive this environment is

In the case of Learner 5, Learner 8 and Learners 19 their skills were called into question – *"they made us feel useless"* and they struggled to overcome this, sinking ever deeper into their own frustration of not being recognised or given the opportunity to perform, even when they were moved to a different worksite.

4.3.4 Punitive Management

Learner 9 was transferred from Worksite 6 to Worksite 5 and observed a marked difference in the management culture. Learner 9 identifies that Manager 9 is not as supportive as Manager 1 in her words Manager 9 is:

- *Very strict*
- *Want things done with exact precision (right the first time and every time)*
- *Sets very high standards*
- *Extreme in his reactions*
- *Leaves little room to accommodate learning, error or supporting the learner*

Learner 9 feels that this may be because Manager 9 is *"very ambitious"*. More insight might be gained from Manager 9's characterisation of the Learners as being temporary employees. For him this represents a management challenge: *"they pass through us – we know we need to look after and support them but this is complicated because they do not belong to us"*. From this statement it becomes clear that for Manager 9 the learners represent a low value partnership in the workplace, because of the temporary nature of their employment.

This sort of characterisation is discussed at length in Boud and Solomon (2003, p. 329) where the authors explain that if an individual identifies themselves as a learner in the workplace, it diminishes the esteem in which work colleagues hold the individual. It would also be consistent with the view that people in the workplace value relationships based on the level to which the potential partner complements their skills and attributes or the level to which they can be recognised as similar (Teboul & Cole 2005, p. 408). Thus in this case the learners feel very different to Manager 9 without offering any long-term value in the organisation.

Unfortunately the prior assessment of Learners 8 and 19, at Worksite 9 had left Manager 9 with a poor evaluation of the skills they have to offer as limited. He felt that this was due to insufficient support at Worksite 9, but also evaluated it as too late to change the pattern of behaviour that had already set in. From the Learner's perspective they recognised that *"we have a strained relationship with Manager 9 – everyone is scared of him. He is difficult to interact with, and not prepared to take any risks. He doesn't understand what the programme is about"* (Learner 8).

An alternative explanation for Manager 9's behaviour may be that he himself had just joined the company and was new at the worksite trying to demonstrate his value and success in this new work environment. As noted by Edmonton and Singer (2012, p. 38) in such challenging situations managers will often adopt *"a coping-oriented approach… characterised by protective or defensive aims and technical oriented leadership"* in these instances managers emphasise execution, efficiency and "*doing it right*". In addition it should be noted that for this time one of Manager 9 key performance targets was the establishment of a quality management system for Worksite 5 – this may have made him hyper focussed on reliable and consistent performance with limited time to support the learning process.

4.3.5 Conflict and Exclusion in the Workplace

Worksite 2, with Manager 2, offers two insightful yet frustrating learner stories. The first being one of dissatisfaction creating conflict and resulting in exclusion. For the project, Manager 2 agreed to host two learners in specialist recruitment and training firm. Her experience within the corporate group stands her in good stead welcoming, introducing and orienting the learners.

Manager 2 planned *"to involve the learners in the two apprentice programmes"* run at the workplace. "*Initially, I thought they would be involved in supporting the training department and then swapped to offer a broader experience."*

Learner 11 got into a conflict cycle with her first supervisor in the apprentice recruitment division which Learner 11 describes as *"an impossible situation, where the supervisor* (Manager R) *is negative to my work and demeaning in her comments to me"*. Manager 2 assesses the situation as a *"conflict mainly due to very different working practices"*.

This triggers the first and final rotation and Learner 11 is placed in the training department. This change works well for both learners. Manager 2 describes this as each *"finding their niche".* Learner 11 reflects on her experience with the training department as very positive showing clearly that she:

1. Preferred working to the deadlines of the training department than to the volume targets in the recruitment department
2. Socialised and integrated better into the team, where she *"felt part of the family"*
3. Appreciated the more collaborative approach taken by the managers (Manager F and Manager C) – *"that everyone is able to contribute ideas and he was really good at involving everyone – soliciting ideas from them"*
4. And, responded to a less restrictive management style which allowed her the *"space to be myself and work"*

The rotation also proves successful for Learner 6, who works well with Manager R. Even finding ways of *"increasing Manager R's efficiency, by improving her filling system and through put"*, this ability to make a difference to a very performance oriented, target driven team won her the inclusion Learner 11 never achieved in the same team. In addition, Learner 6 responded to the different personalities in the work environment differently *"I have learnt that there are many different personalities at work, but that this does not have to be a negative thing – we do not all need to be the same*"

Learner 11's need for inclusion is again demonstrated in her protest to not being included in the company team building and, subsequently because of the way Learner 11 responded to not going on

the team building by *"making an issue of a non-issue"* and not accepting that *"they are not entitled to everything (e.g. office team building)"* (Manager 2), not included in the Christmas function.

Learner 11 also expresses an intense dissatisfaction at not working more closely with Manager 2, *"she ended up not really being involved"* and *"I felt like a new vase that had lost its shine"*. Interestingly Manager 2 kept monitoring Learner 11's progress but felt she had delegated the day-to-day management and mentoring to the training team. Her closer involvement with Learner 6 came from Learner 6 being placed in her department directly but also responding well to the coaching.

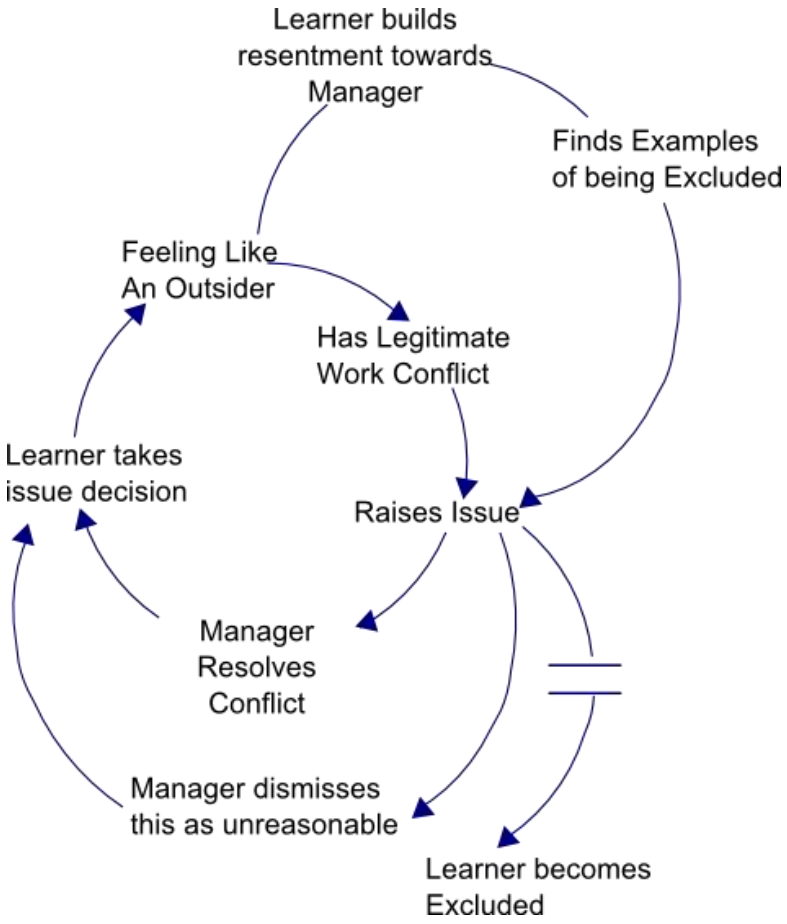
Learner 11 raised her dissatisfaction in the workplace with me as the researcher and as being part of the training institution and remained oblivious to any constraints that either I or the managers were working under. Learner 11 expressed her dissatisfaction as *"if the Project Manager can't defend us, who can?"* This seems to mirror the experience observed by Maboa ((Masters Dissertation) Evaluating the Impact of the Employment Skills Development Services Training Programmes of the Department of Labour 2009, p. 15) *"Dealing with desperate, unemployed subjects tended to create a confusing impression in that they viewed the researcher as someone who was there to solve their problems, either with the provider or someone elsewhere. They tended to perceive their interaction with the researcher as an opportunity to voice their frustrations".* Although in this case it did not seem to originate as much from being unemployed as Learner 11's need to be included and *"consulted"* in every decision.

Eventually, Learner 11's conduct brings her notoriety at the worksite; Manager 2 observes that *"she been noticed for negative reasons and therefore employing her would become difficult"*.

In summary I reflect on the fact that Learner 11 got caught in a conflict-exclusion cycle as illustrated in Figure 28. The initial cycle seems fairly simple in that the learner arrives at the workplace feeling like an outsider. She then gets into a legitimate conflict, with the workplace supervisor and raises the issue. The Manager identifies the problem as *"two different work styles"* and moves the learner to a different team. Although happy in the new team – the learner feels the conflict was not fully resolved and takes issue with the decision of moving her, without consequences for the supervisor, as observed from the learner's perspective. This makes the Learner feel more like an outsider and she builds a deeper

resentment towards the workplace manager. At this point the learner notices that she has been excluded in the workplace, e.g. the company teambuilding event.

FIGURE 28: CONFLICT EXCLUSION CYCLE



The learner develops a reputation for making *"issues out of non-issues"* and finally the manager and others at the company feel that she will never fit in and decide to exclude her by not offering her a permanent position.

4.3.6 Pregnancy

The second learner story from Worksite 2 is that of Learner 6. In many ways this is a simple story. Learner 6 was making good progress and describes her growth in the workplace as *"going from thirteen*

to thirty overnight". Manager 2 noted the incredible progress Learner 6 had made: *"I saw Learner 6 face challenges, and no longer be scared to apply herself - she wanted to be involved in activities and I saw her confidence build over the duration of her work experience."*

At the end of the programme Manager 2 observes: *"I wanted to employ Learner 6 but was vetoed by our MD. She needs to show more growth as an individual - if she continues on this growth path then we would consider employing her."* Manager 2 would ideally have like to channel Learner 6 into another WIL programme for her to continue developing.

So why did Learner 6 come up short. Three reasons can be identified from her report:

- She started with a *"very negative perception of people at work – created by my parents and others in our community"* and this made her hesitant to participate and try things;
- She had to find a way of reframing her strengths and weaknesses – one of these included her voice. Being very soft spoken she had repeatedly been advised that she would have to change, but this just made her more apprehensive to speak;
- She fell pregnant – and her three month maternity leave limited her final workplace experience and exposure.

At this point I believe that the additional three months would have allowed Learner 6 to reach the proficiency required by the workplace.

Learner 6 is not the only learner that became pregnant. Out of the 4 learners who fell pregnant only one was eventually employed. The other three learners seemed to be isolated in the workplace due to becoming pregnant as well as being temporary employees on a learning programme. This situation limited the investment staff were prepared to make at integrating them into the workplace or supporting their learning. Learner 12's experience where the support she received changed dramatically when her mentor at Worksite 9 found out she was pregnant highlights a different impact of pregnancy.

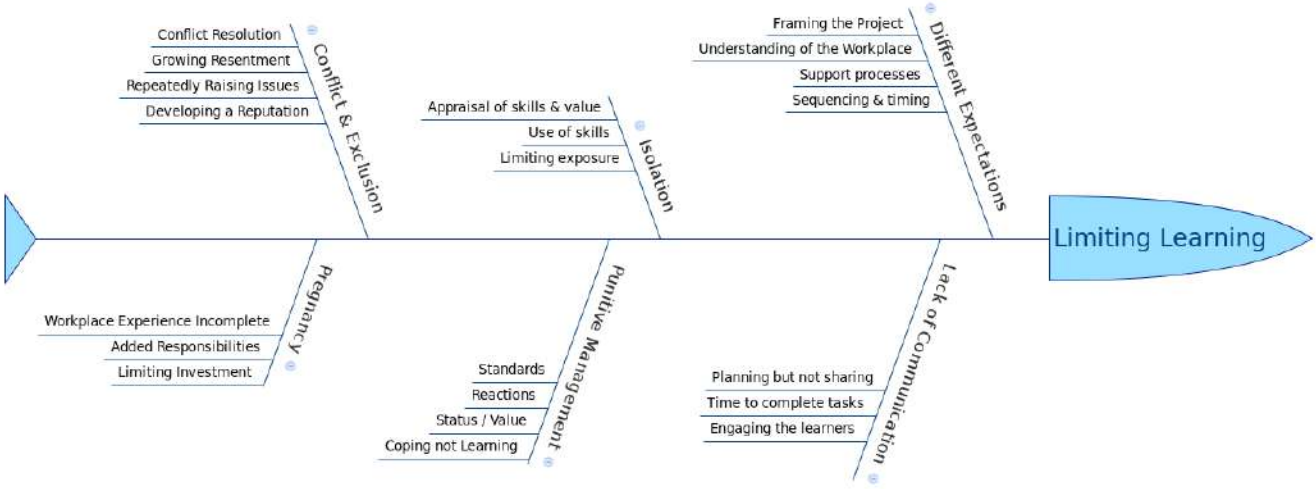
Learner 12's mentor was herself pregnant and had such a positive initial interaction with Learner 12 that the mentor had already envisaged training Learner 12 to provide continuity when the mentor went

on maternity leave. Learner 12 falling pregnant put an end to these plans, and subsequently the mentor disinvested from supporting Learner 12's progress.

4.3.7 Evaluating the Impact

Figure 29, summarises the factors that limit learning in the workplace discussed in the sections above.

FIGURE 29: FACTORS LIMITING LEARNING



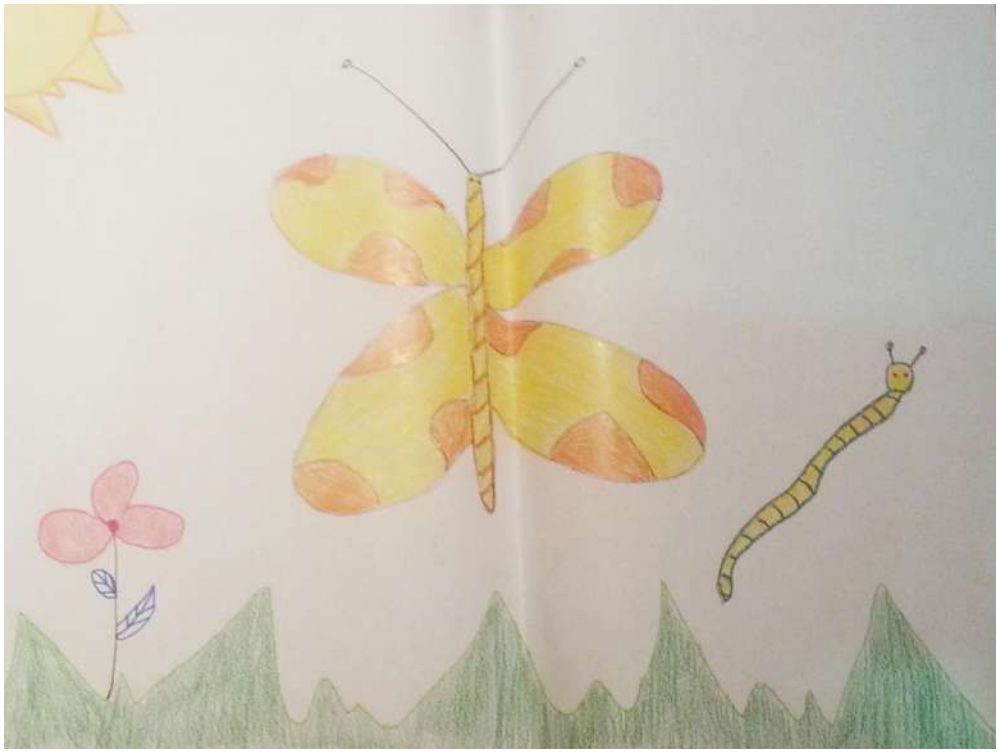
In each case the overwhelming impact seems to be the sense of agency of the individual learner which is in some way curbed and requires additional effort or motivation from the individual to overcome the limitation.

Those learners who faced some of these challenges and still managed to gain entry into the workplace seemed to have stronger sense of purpose and better self-knowledge than those who did not. Learner 18 observes that for her the experience can be compared to the development cycle of a butterfly. In that the butterfly spends most of its life as a grub, building up its reserves, the 'experiences and knowledge' it needs to fly. In the final stages when it is ready to become a butterfly it becomes protected in a chrysalis. Learner 18 similarly felt exposed for most of her experience until she recognised that she could make a contribution, saw herself as a butterfly and was accepted as such in the workplace. This is characterised by her illustration of her experience in Figure 30, and her summary

of how she benefitted from the programme: *"I gained experience, training but most of all self-understanding / self-knowledge".*

Those learners for whom these limiting factors proved consequential often felt unsupported in their endeavours describing the workplace as complex and unsupportive. Many learners have made the connection that it is not about the particular workplace but more about the particular manager, with the success of the programme depending on *"the managers openness to share, delegate and try new things"* (Learner 8).

FIGURE 30: LEARNER 18'S ILLUSTRATION OF HER EXPERIENCE

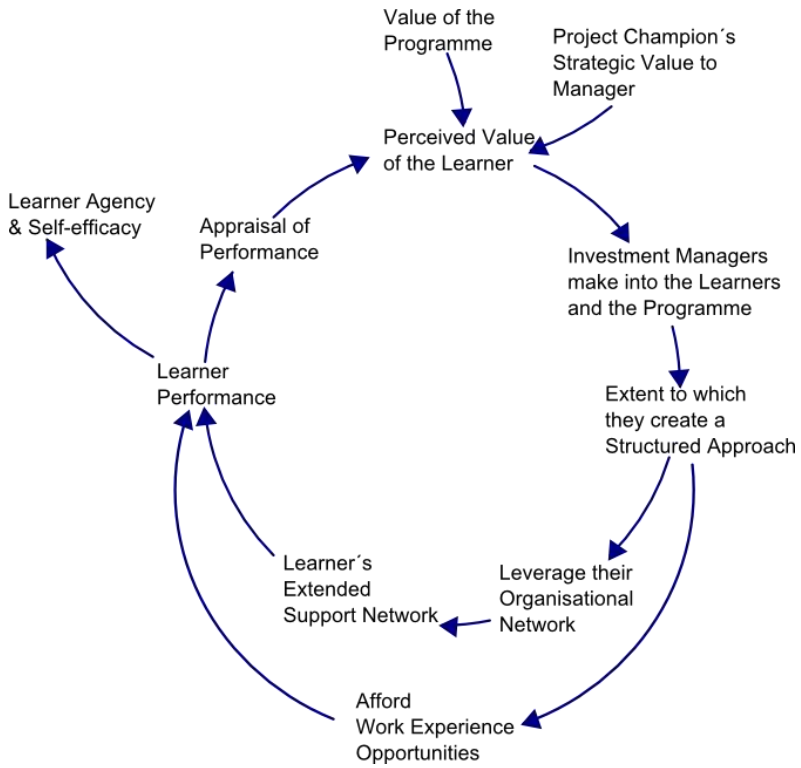


Emphasis on the relationship between the manager and the learner is confirmed by Learner 16, who observed that a lack of centralised control to ensure consistency across the different worksites is necessary. . He noted that the learners who were able to build close relationships with their managers (describing these managers as the "*mother flower*") who are "*thriving*" while those who were "*operating in the shadow*" were "*allowed to whither*". Learner 16 struggled to establish any meaningful

relationships with his managers or mentors because his "*managers were changed multiple times*". In this case seeing other learners have a positive relationship with their managers made him resentful of not being able to do the same.

Pulling all the insights together, it becomes apparent that the value judgement the managers make of the learners critically influences the time, energy and effort they invest in the programme and supporting the learners. This influences the extent to which they are prepared to create a structured approach, by planning the progression of the learners and calling on their own networks in the organisation to enhance the learner's experience. It also influences the extent to which the managers introduce the learners to more people in the organisation, for the learner to start building their own extended support network. Together the opportunity afforded to the learner, their relationship with the manager and the extended support network shape the learners work experience. This builds the learners performance and the assessment of their value (by themselves – enhancing their self-efficacy, and agency) as well as building the perceived value they have to the organisation and manager.

FIGURE 31: LINKING THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF A LEARNER WITH THEIR WORK EXPERIENCE



As the learners themselves may have limited perceived value this can be enhanced by the perceived value of the programme and the association with the project champion.

4.3.8 Concluding Remarks

As with the approaches supporting learning the impact of the socialisation and integration of the learner into the workplace makes the biggest difference. From the factors that impede learning in the workplace it becomes clear that it is necessary to:

1. Set and manage the expectations of both the managers and learners;
2. Build a bridge between the managers and the learners by being open about the learners' abilities, encouraging the managers to challenge their assumptions about the learners' abilities, and identifying opportunities where the learner would be able to make a contribution;
3. Provide quick and clear conflict resolution mechanisms;
4. Encourage and create open communication between all partners; and
5. Manage unexpected events, such as the pregnancy, by exploring the impact this has on the workplace plans and the training plans.

4.4 Learning Environment

Figure 31 does not include the prevailing attitudes and approaches to learning in the organisation – that is, the culture of learning which translates into the importance of support afforded to learning processes within an organisation.

4.4.1 Culture of Learning

From the initial meetings, the project champion indicated that his perception of the organisation is one that lacks a culture of learning.

> *"I know that this is part of your research and I don't think that I want to prepare the managers any differently to what they currently do. But I think that there is a lack of learning culture".*
>
> Project Champion

The project champion was of the opinion that while the worksite managers within the company agreed to learner placements during the work integrated learning project, a large number of managers were unfamiliar with supporting learning in an organisation. This is supported by most managers who confirmed being unfamiliar with the WIL concept as well as not being responsible for learning in the workplace in general. This is in line with HR as a service and control function (Gharajedaghi 2011, p. 200; Boudreau & Lawler 2014, p. 243), where normally more emphasis is placed on administration and control – making sure that corporate policy is being upheld (Boudreau & Lawler 2014, p. 233). In these cases many HR departments start acting as brokers securing outside support and service providers for all HRD activities with little more influence than project coordination and administration (Boudreau & Lawler 2014, p. 235).

In order to establish a true baseline for the organisation's readiness to support WIL, the project champion requested no additional capacity building be conducted to support the managers. Rather managers were made aware of the requirements to support learners on an ongoing basis, without detailed planning and preparation of the requirements for support before placing the learners It was decided that planning and preparation for the WIL project in the workplace would be conducted during the first introductory meeting at the individual worksites.

This approach had some negative effects, in that, managers saw this is a "*lack of information"* and that very little was communicated to them before the WIL project started. Some managers viewed their participation in the WIL project as a *"favour"* to the project champion.

At the same time learners required support during WIL as indicated by Learner 4:

> *"Needs to provide practical experience and help "connect more dots" to the work responsibilities – so not just what is required by the training programme, but also what is required to do the job"*
>
> Learner 4

Most learners felt that their workplace managers did not provide sufficient support for learning initially and many felt that managers were "*intimidating and busy"* (Learner 17) and there was an expectation that learners had to hit the ground running.

The question therefore is whether a culture of learning in an organisation automatically leads to more support of new comers into the organisation. Wang and Ahmed describe a learning organisation as:

- Learning is part of people's thinking
- There are processes for learning together
- People are encouraged to make a contribution

(Wang & Ahmed 2003, p. 15)

This means that the organisation must have processes that allow people to learn together. Wang & Ahmed's description of a learning organisation (Wang & Ahmed 2003, p. 15), seem to confirm the expectation of the Project Champion, regarding managers' lack of awareness of learning or support for learning. However, Wang and Ahmed's definition (2003, p. 10) also requires the organisation to be able to create an environment capable of sustaining learning – including collaborative team work, participative corporate intellectual capital and continuous improvement (intentionally striving to improve performance) as the components of organisational learning.

As the project progressed, it became evident from observations made in the workplace during site visits and data collection that many of the companies participating in the WIL project were open to learning and seem to function well in collaborative teams.

Learner 14 indicates that:

> *"Things have changed for the better at my workplace. It is like when I am not there, there is gap. They trust me. They believe in me. They encourage me and they teach me lots of stuff".*

Learner 14

While it seems that the workplace may be benefiting from the contribution that the learner makes, it also indicates that managers can develop a learning culture, provide support to learners and take an interest in them when placed at the workplace for work integrated learning. The change that occurred within the organisation indicates a positive outcome, confirming that learners are viewed in terms of their potential contribution or value to the company as proposed by Ahlgren & Tett (2010, p. 24).

However, for the entire organisation to be learning and responding to new developments, structures and processes need to be set up since not all managers were willing to change.

Moore's (2010, p. 29) study indicates that it becomes important for managers to "*champion work based learning*" and many managers become more engaged in follow-on projects. However, the skills required to enable learning are different to the ones required in a traditional setting. According to Moore (2010, p. 27) managers "*enable learning*" by "*having a flexible approach to learning, enable practice development*" rather than concentrating on enforcing process, "*legitimise personal development and encourage*" collaboration with colleagues. Managers inhibit learning when they adopt a teaching approach, "*have unsupportive staff and lack organisational systems that encourage communication and commitment*" (2010, p. 27). This is also supported by Edmonson & Singer (2012, p. 37) who highlight that in a learning culture managers help teams cope with or *"tolerate ambiguity*" by focussing on learning from experiences and events, exploring alternative approaches and challenging the unspoken assumptions that underpin standard practice in the organisation. Therefore it becomes important to help managers develop practices that foster cooperation and learning rather than focus on giving the pedagogic tools to become trainers.

One way of ensuring that line managers and mentors responsible for WIL in the workplace build their capacity to manage WIL, is to have clear strategies for learning which involve individual learning, team learning and organisational learning at multiple levels within the organisation. In addition it should be considered to complete a joint capacity plan to ensure the workload for all stakeholders remains balanced and the most appropriate people manage the delivery for the agreed programme objectives.

4.4.2 Concluding Remarks

The key to understanding an organisation's learning culture seems to lie in understanding its context. It is only by creating a bigger picture of what the organisation is about that it becomes possible to understand how and where it is possible to support learning.

In this study the worksite's demonstrated a preference for working in teams this created an opportunity to extend the learner's experiences beyond the individual divisions in which they were placed. However it also meant that they needed to make a contribution and gain recognition within the team before they

were supported further. The team pressures shaped how much time and energy was invested in helping the learner.

Especially at the beginning of the project it becomes important to help managers and learners identify the opportunities, space and times that would be available to promote learning.

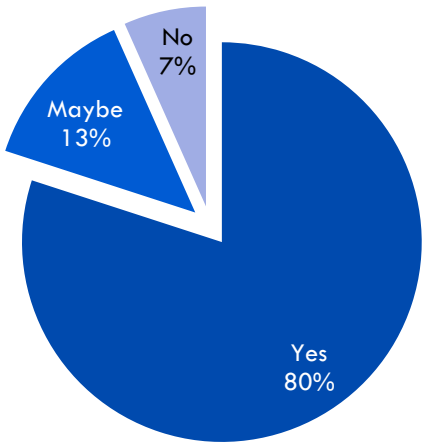
4.5 Employability

For this study I have defined employability as the *ability* to find, secure, keep, manage and grow in a job.

To evaluate the employability contribution of the project I asked the learners:

- If participating in the project would make it easier to find a job? The majority believed that the programme offered an advantage

FIGURE 32: LEARNER RESPONSE - EASIER TO FIND A JOB?



In exploring how they had grown the learners identified the following skills and benefits from the project.

Learners appreciated having more skills and expertise while managers valued the learners' abilities to make a contribution to the organisation. The manager's preference for skills that make the learner more productive in the work environment is evident and supports the position that employability is a way for the employer to bridge the requirement to get someone productive in the work environment faster (Yorke 2006, pp. 5,8).

From the literature (Yorke & Knight 2006, p. 5; Marock 2008, p. 8; Griesel & Parker 2009, p. 5) I identified that employability involves:

- Deep understanding of the core discipline – understanding what to do and being able to help others make this evident
- Skilful practice – the learners developed this as can be seen from the value placed on their communication and experience bias.
- Self-efficacy – the newly found confidence and the ability to confront new situations indicate that the learners have developed these skills
- The ability to learn – the problem solving, clearer thinking and participation group activities are all indicators that the learners have a stronger meta-cognition skill

Although I was not interested in judging the employability through employment the fact that eight of the learners have been able to find employment out of the project is encouraging with one learner starting his own Non-profit organisation.

4.5.1 Factors Influencing Learner Employability

Learners placed at the workplace during a WIL programme require an environment and circumstances that promote learning, "*fostering the development of the whole person*" (Boud & Garrick 2001, p. 5). In this study, several general factors and some more specific factors emerged that can be related to improving the employability of learners through the workplace experience. This section will discuss the more general factors that pertain to most learners.

Although responses from learners indicate that only twenty percent (20%) of the managers gave advice, set clear goals and encouraged learning at the beginning of the WIL project, it became evident

that managers were developing their own approach to promoting learning whilst hosting learners. Manager 2 set herself the goal of helping the learners learn as much about the workplace as possible, which resulted in her wanting to help the learners develop and explore their work style:

> *"See how they approach and cope with different work situations and environments – expose them to different work environments for them to learn when their work style works and when not."*
>
> (Manager 2)

This move towards promoting learning, in particular as it relates to *being* in the workplace remains what Engeström (2004, p. 151) calls the "*hidden curriculum*" related to the social nuances of working and cooperating with others. This may not have been explicit to learners at the time until the project was near completion when most learners claimed to have been given opportunity to learn in the workplace. Being in the workplace and socially interacting with others may be the best outcome of the WIL programme as opposed to focusing purely on the outcomes of formal training programmes and qualifications.

Further, managers analysed learner's abilities to perform by allocating tasks within strict time frames and reviewing their performance (Manager 7). Learner's outputs were measured informally against the workplace requirements, in that, managers provided feedback when tasks were completed. Although not all responses and feedback were positive, it allowed learners to understand and learn on the job. It is evident that some managers sent learners on additional courses in order to complete specific workplace tasks, particularly where managers felt that learners can play an active role in the organisation. For example, Learner 18 was sent on a Time Management course, to adopt a similar approach to managing her day as the other team members that she worked with, and Labour Relations Training to help her in her interactions with various staff members.

In addition, as the project progressed, seventy-five percent (75%) of the managers showed an interest in learners with regard to workplace tasks for completion of portfolios of evidence against specific outcomes of the WIL programme, as discussed in section **Error! Reference source not found.**, despite the required tasks conflicting with other priorities. Some managers displayed patience (Manager 1, Manager 8), others counselled learners and helped them "*face their fears*" (Manager 2) while others challenged the learners with a variety of tasks, which included those tasks outside their

discipline (Learner 9 with Manager 9). In each case the learner developed some self-awareness and understood how to work and how to be at work (Manager 3, Manager 8).

Most of the managers pursued the goal of helping the learners become work-ready or to prepare them for a specific job, so as to enhance their employability, within this environment. However they were uncertain how to start making that shift for workplace priorities to focusing on workplace learning. Hence, Manager 7 estimates that *"only about ten percent (10%) of managers can coach or mentor"*. Therefore, as an unintended consequence of participation in the WIL programme, managers' own training needs in respect of coaching and mentoring emerged.

Hence, it evident that if the workplace recognises the lack of capacity to assist learners during the WIL project, then a shift in the thinking of managers as mentors has occurred. Managers have begun to realise their own shortcomings in creating a learning space for new entrants during a WIL programme. If, however, nothing is done about building the capacity of managers, there will be very little that managers themselves would be able to contribute in enhancing the employability of learners.

In their review of how learning needs to be reframed when contemplating the organisation as a learning space, Matthews and Candy (2001, pp. 60-61) propose six principles for action:

1. Treat everyone as "*an intelligent knowledgeable being*" (Matthews & Candy 2001, p. 60);
2. Recognise that "*people both shape and are shaped by their work contexts*" (Matthews & Candy 2001, p. 61);
3. Structure and manage workplaces that individuals and groups can collaborate in developing and applying know-how (Matthews & Candy 2001, p. 61);
4. Allow organisations to transcend beyond the sum of their parts by exploring what "*makes them transcend beyond the individuals that make them up*" (Matthews & Candy 2001, p. 61);
5. "*Value and invite contributions from all*" (Matthews & Candy 2001, p. 61);
6. Learning is interconnected *"individuals, teams, and entire workplaces are bound together by a concern and a commitment to learning*" (Matthews & Candy 2001, p. 61) in which learning from one situation is transferred to another but also all organisational players including teams and managers have a role to play.

These steps involve supporting individuals to become part of a collective effort, where each person makes their contribution, to achieving a common goal. So although general factors were observed and noted, which seems to have played a part in improving the employability of learners, more specific factors also emerged. The following sub-themes are highlighted as specific factors that contributed to the employability of learners in this study:

- Socialisation and integration into the workplace,
- Team interaction,
- Having a work identity,
- Learners own motivation and attitude,
- Peer support.

Of which the first two have been discussed already.

4.5.1.1 Having a Work Identity

Analysing data to investigate the contribution that the workplace makes to the employability of unemployed graduates during WIL, necessitates examining how learners perceive their own identity within the worksite. At the start of the project thirty-three percent (33%) of the learners wanted to develop their people skills and learn about themselves and their performance in the workplace. This desire to know themselves seems to stem from a desire to "*know [their] purpose*" (Learner 6) to come across as "*competent*" (Learner 6) and "*educated*" (Learner 6). However, all learners identified themselves as individuals who were placed at the workplace to learn, and not as employees as was evident from their expectations discussed earlier in his section.

In each case it was necessary for the individuals to find a balance between the different roles they played across the different facets of their lives and the work that they were involved in. In the work context, Learner 9 became known for her organisational skills and efficiency (Manager 9, Project Champion) and felt disappointed when she was not able to live up to that expectation. Similarly she expresses hesitancy at working with the finance department but is able to accommodate that change when it is positioned into a greater vision of becoming a divisional manager in the future. It is with this vision of the future that she is able cope with frustrating tasks because she can see their necessity or

how they build skills for the future. This is consistent with Kira and Balkin's (2014) second work identity interaction in which *"frustrating work can foster thriving if employees and their organisations find ways to bring employees' work and identities closer to each other"* (Kira & Balkin 2014, p. 140).

Learner 16 started on the programme to explore the corporate environment, but kept running a small business on the side. This resulted in him missing a number of work days and generally being described as having "*moments of brilliance*" (Manager 9). He however identified most with "*building his own business*" (Learner 16) and was continuously evaluating events and actions in terms of their contribution to this venture. It was clear to see his pride when the Project Champion described him as someone who could sell 'ice to Eskimos' at the close-out meeting of the project. In this case Learner 16's dominant identification with his identity as an entrepreneur limits the amount of time he is prepared to spend on routine work at the workplace and he is unable to create a new identity for himself in the workplace context – resulting in his performance at work slipping and him not being employed. Reframing this in Kira and Balkin's (2014) terms his identity as an entrepreneur caused his workplace identity to "*whither*".

On a smaller scale each learner went through an oscillation between the wanting to be and HRD specialist or an HR management or Industrial Relations specialist. In most cases the dominant career choice matched that of their workplace. For example, Learner 6 found a way of integrating her caring personality into the process of recruitment. In that she felt she was able to be the interviewer she "*had always wanted*":

> *"For me it is something I always wanted, you know going to an interview without being scared, to be able to open up. It's what I wished for and for me to be able to give that to someone gave me a sense of belonging and knowing I am doing good for others. So I enjoy interviewing people, giving them advice if they don't answer correctly"*
>
> (Learner 6)

There seems to be a greater synergy between Learner 6 work identity and her work practice allowing her to maximise on her learning experience as confirmed by Illeris (Illeris 2004, p. 434) in the literature review. However, eighty-seven percent (87%), found that they enjoyed the HRD discipline and "*working*

with people" (Learner 14) which had influenced their study choice originally, and learning a speciality within the field enhanced their learning experience.

For Learner 14 the programme and work experience correlated with his vision for himself. Having worked previously as a temporary HR clerk he was keen to get into a large organisation to work in a team and help others build their careers. He reports being happiest and exhibits strong job satisfaction at the close of the project when he finally works with the apprentices on a daily basis:

> *"Now I have access to the apprentices, and I'm able to use my skill and knowledge learned from training. They give me lots of work to do and they are supporting me. I'm starting to work with more apprentices and that's interesting".*
>
> (Learner 14)

At least sixty percent (60%) of the learners showed a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses at the close of the project, thirty three percent (33%) expressing surprise at being able to perform in a pressurised work environment, deal with disagreements or stand up for themselves and their ideas.

For most learners this ended up being the longest, most stable period of working, and although all learners exhibited pride in having completed the qualification, those who received an offer of employment seemed to have achieved a special distinction and self- worth. The learners avidly compared offers of employment during the feedback session. Hence, we note that work did seem to offer a sense of *"personal and social advancement, of prestige, of virtue and of self-fulfilment*" (Watson 2003, p. 174) for the learners, creating the impression that the transition into employment was indeed a rite of passage.

From the data we can infer that the work experience learners obtain during a WIL programme, shapes the learners identity to allow them to imagine or visualise themselves as working productive members of society – they start to believe that "I can do it" and "I can fit in" – no longer doubting themselves and no longer being an outsider in the organisation increasing their level of confidence and contributing to their employability.

Finally, I would like to highlight that in many ways it is difficult to distinguish between the individuals work identity and the manifest behaviours which were described as the individual's personality or attitude. What was observed was that performance and learning seemed to require exactly the right balance between "challenge, support and confidence" (Ahlgren & Tett 2010, p. 25). As such I now explore how the learners' motivation and attitudes are linked to their learning experience in the workplace in order to investigate how the dynamic work environment contributes to their employability.

4.5.1.2 Learners Motivation, Personality and Attitude

The learner as the central point of WIL project brings into the workplace their own motivation, personality, attitude and expectations that are shaped by their own previous experiences. This section evaluates how learners' motivation and attitude, influence how managers in the workplace relate to learners.

Motivation, personality and attitude in the workplace emerged as closely related themes – as noted by Hinchcliffe and Jolly (Graduate identity and employability 2011, p. 575) *"employers are looking for performance — the ability to deliver results. And ...experience of engagement with others across a variety of contexts"* and motivation, personality and attitude are critical in maintaining these. However, data from different examples explains the impact this had in the workplace. Hence, the presentation and discussion data for each of these themes is done separately within this section.

4.5.1.2.1 Motivation

A chief sense of motivation for all learners was to participate in the programme to gain work experience. This is primarily seen as a result of the overwhelming desire to gain employment held by all learners. However, forty-seven percent (47%) of the learners specified an interest in obtaining the specific YDP qualification and similarly forty-seven percent (47%) of the learners wanted to build a practical understanding of HR. Although most learners who wanted to build their HR knowledge also wanted to complete the qualification, this correlation is not a given. As the programme progressed, learners indicated that they had a motivation to learn and succeed when they were able to engage in the task because it is interesting or personally challenging (Learner 13, Learner 14).

Learners also believed that regardless of what existed in their situation at work, they wanted to complete the programme

- Wanting to complete and receive the qualification (Learner 5)
- Get as much experience as possible to enable them to get a job (Learner 6)
- Remain optimistic so that the manager will recognize their ability and contribution (Learner 13, Learner 18).

This indicated that their motivation was intrinsic despite some constraints within the work environment (and despite their personal constraints). Whilst negative environmental influences did affect some learners (e.g. Learner 8), others remained positive that they were learning through the workplace opportunity that was provided merely by engaging in a variety of tasks that they were never exposed to before, and that this would be beneficial in the long run (e.g. Learner 12). This seems to be related to the learners own motivation and will to succeed.

There seems to be a correlation between intrinsic motivation, the ability to adapt to the workplace and the ability to learn new tasks. This has been confirmed by Major, et al. (2006) who show that people who have a proactive personality, that is people with a *"tendency to show initiative and take action in one's environment in order to effect meaningful change"* (Major, Turner & Fletcher 2006, p. 934) are more likely to succeed both in a learning and a career context. Parker et al (2006) attribute this to a self-belief in which they believe themselves capable of most tasks, in addition to feeling that they can control the outcome of any situation mainly by continuously wanting to *"search for opportunities to act"* (Parker, Williams & Turner 2006, p. 638) and feeling a "*personal responsibility*" to improve situations. These individuals adopt an inclusive attitude towards tasks such as "*'my job' rather than 'not my job'*" (Parker, Williams & Turner 2006, p. 639).

However, despite declaring the need to succeed, only some learners stood out as being extremely motivated, showing initiative and being proactive. Out of all the learners, Learner 9 was probably the best example to consistently demonstrate all these traits. In her case, the Project Champion recognised this drive in the orientation session at the beginning of the project. On comparing the different learners, while each represents some of these traits at one time or another, recognising the level of motivation as

being deeply intrinsic something extra needs to be displayed. As an example both Learner 9 and Learner 6 were reported to have developed filing systems and made an impact on the efficiency of the departments they were helping (Manager 9, Manager 2). Learner 9 continued to search for new opportunities to organise and help, Learner 6 kept working with the same consultant not searching for new opportunities. What the comparison in these learner's cases suggest is that proactive traits need to be displayed fairly consistently to identify the difference a person is making to be noticed. It also seems important to be able to exhibit more than one trait, to have the personality that fits in and an attitude of wanting to learn.

4.5.1.2.2 Personality and Attitude

From the learner reports it seems that the learner's personality and attitude in the workplace played a major role in how the manager related to each of them. Two learners (Learner 6 and Learner 11) at the same worksite, reporting to Manager 2 had very different workplace experiences which were linked to their attitude in the workplace. For the project, Manager 2 agreed to host two learners in specialist recruitment and training firm. Her experience within the corporate group stood her in good stead welcoming, introducing and orienting both the learners.

Manager 2 planned *"to involve the learners in the two apprentice programmes"* run at the workplace. "*Initially, I thought they would be involved in supporting the training department and then swapped to offer a broader experience"* (Manager 2).

However, only Learner 6 reports a positive experience:

> *"She gave me lots of feedback and advice –- She remained connected - kept in touch with what I was doing and where I was at. She was prepared to do additional training to address skills and knowledge gaps. She always took the time to explain what needs to be done.*
>
> (Learner 6)

Learner 11's story from Worksite 2 is one of dissatisfaction, creating conflict and resulting in exclusion. Learner 11 got into a conflict cycle with her first supervisor in the apprentice recruitment division which Learner 11 describes as *"an impossible situation, where the supervisor* (Manager R[1]) *is "negative to my work and demeaning in her comments to me"*. Manager 2 assesses the situation as a *"conflict mainly due to very different working practices"* between learners.

This triggers the first and final rotation and Learner 11 is placed in the training department instead. This change works well for both learners. Manager 2 describes this as each *"finding their niche".* Learner 11 reflects on her experience with the training department as very positive showing clearly that she:

- Preferred working to the deadlines of the training department than to the volume targets in the recruitment department;
- Socialised and integrated better into the team, where she *"felt part of the family"* (Learner 11);
- Appreciated the more collaborative approach taken by the managers (Manager F and Manager C) – *"that everyone is able to contribute ideas and he was really good at involving everyone – soliciting ideas from them"* (Learner 11);
- And, responded to a less restrictive management style which allowed her the *"space to be myself and work"* (Learner 11).

The rotation also proves successful for Learner 6, who works well with Manager R. Even finding ways of *"increasing Manager R's efficiency, by improving her filling system and through put"* (Manager 2), this ability to make a difference to a very performance oriented, target driven team won her the inclusion which Learner 11 never achieved in the same team. In addition, Learner 6 responded to the different personalities in the work environment differently *"I have learnt that there are many different personalities at work, but that this does not have to be a negative thing – we do not all need to be the same*" (Learner 6).

[1] Where managers are referred to as Manager C, F & R, had contact with the learner but were not responsible for the learner's work experience and were not interviewed as participants in the study.

The question is: Why did Learner 6 succeed in maintaining a good relationship and working well with Manager 2 and not Learner 11? If the worksite is the same and the manager is the same, could there have been a difference in the personalities and attitudes of the two learners? There seems to be a strong indication that a difference in the personality and attitude of the learner plays a part in how they conduct themselves in the workplace in relation to what drives their motivation and ultimately their employability.

So thinking about it employability is not just about getting the job it is about keeping it and growing in the job. This case clearly demonstrates that keeping oneself motivated consistently is important. So when managers evaluate employability of learners, it is not just a point event as in an interview – it means assessing employability as wanting to employ the person and work with them for a long time.

4.5.1.2.3 Peer Interaction

A surprising finding in the study is the influence that peer interaction had on learners. Peer interaction seemed to have contributed to the employability of learners both positively and negatively. This comes from the fact that during the roll out of the WIL project, learners were brought together into the classroom every month for at least five days for the structured learning component. Group interaction amongst learners was encouraged and learners were requested to share their workplace experience with each other. During group discussions, learners highlighted both their positive and negative work experiences and this interaction allowed opportunity for learners to become familiar with one another. Learners of their own accord decided to form a *WhatsApp* group to remain in contact with one another whilst at the workplace. The ETD institution became aware of the *WhatsApp* arrangement during the final interview stage.

Whilst the notion of peer support was initiated by the learners themselves as a form of motivating one another, it seems to have played a part in the learners' experiences such as:

- Learner 13 supporting Learner 11 and Learner 6 in trying to keep them motivated and helping them navigate the workplace challenges;

- Learners 5 and 12 felt less isolated while on maternity leave, also with the peer support that they received from the *WhatsApp* group.

However, when learners compared opportunities and relationships that occurred at different worksites, some learners were dismayed by the differences. At this stage it is unclear what precise effect the peer interaction and support had on learners in the study. Nuances from the data and the hours spent by the Project Coordinator motivating and acting as a sounding-board for the learners suggests that there is a need for more positive peer level support. Marsick and Watkins (2001, p. 210) find that peer support is crucial and necessary in work based learning but that it needs to at least in part occur in a negotiated win-win context. Peer support holds the key to building "*the capacity of individuals and groups for continuous learning"* (Marsick & Watkins 2001, p. 210).

4.5.2 Concluding Remarks

Factors in the workplace that directly influenced the employability of learners were the integration and socialisation processes that were followed as well as the kind of team interaction that was encouraged. However, time pressures cause learners to become overwhelmed and compromises quality and accuracy of learner output.

Finally, it is important to recognise that a learner's own motivation, personality type and attitude must be considered to ensure success with how managers perceive the learner. How learners identify themselves also results in whether they engage with the work activities in a synergistic manner – their 'work identity' is important. Hence, it is clear that whilst the work experience in itself does contribute to the employability of learners, a number of interconnected factors affect learning in the workplace and careful consideration must be given to individual situations.

4.6 Summary Findings

Firstly the analysis of the learner backgrounds showed that the learners employability and success in the workplace is less dependent on their home environment, parents' histories and the learner's existing qualifications and more dependent on what the learners gain from the WIL programme itself.

Where the background did have an impact was in the support required for the project including transport and guidance counselling.

From the study, I realised that managers seemed to adopt one of three approaches.

A structured approach - in which managers evaluated their worksites and the requirements of the programme to assess what experiences they could afford the learners and what support they could provide. The structured approach offered a great deal of support to the learners and they responded well to this form of programme, with these learners being seen as the lucky / favoured ones by the rest of the learning cohort.

An unstructured but managed approach, I have termed “going with the flow” – in which the primary objective seems to be to integrate the learner into the workplace and less emphasis is placed on the programme,

The unstructured but managed approach seemed to fit the workplace best in that they were able to develop the learner into precisely the team member that the organisation needed. This approach did however leave the manager and learner in continual doubt as to whether they are meeting the programme requirements.

Leaving it to the Learner, this is an unstructured and unmanaged approach with all activities being driven by the learner taking initiative and building their own networks, where learners systematically work their way into being a trusted member of the team. This approach required a self-driven and flexible learner, who was prepared to continually adjust to the workplace and seek out additional work and contacts. This was difficult to do as often learners in a WIL programme are afforded little or no status in an organisation. Thus learners face the continual risk of being excluded from the workplace and work teams.

The structured approach enabled managers to take a more proactive stance with respect to the WIL programme and allowed them to shape, monitor and assess the learners expectations, progress, and personal development. However, experienced managers however, found that supporting WIL projects

was time consuming and would want something that mirrored their work practices more closely to minimise the overhead involved.

The study also identified six primary inhibiting factors that slowed learning in the workplace, and in some cases brought it to a complete standstill:

1. Differing expectations – whether this linked to expectations for the outcome of the programme, the processes through which the learners should be supported or even how a workplace functions (or should ideally function). The level to which managers and learners could not find mutual understanding in this regard would impact their level of engagement or support for the programme. In some cases the inertia of not having their expectations met caused the learners to withdraw, doing only what is absolutely required by the programme or the workplace
2. Lack of communication – it was surprising to see to what extent both learners and managers would assume that they did not need to share information with the other party. Whether it was learners assuming that managers already knew what their programme deliverable were or managers who conducted detailed planning but never shared their plans, expectations and goals with the learners
3. Isolation – it was possible for workplaces to systematically isolate the learners from the work practices, by limiting their access to infrastructure and information. However Learners found their skills called into question, their activity limited to repetitive tasks and never introduced to other members of staff. This impacted the way the learners valued their own skills and made them withdraw from work activity even further
4. Punitive management - managers who, for whatever reason, emphasised performance over learning created a climate in which learners started talking less risk and felt that the standards to be maintained were impossible and this eventually affected their performance. This was exacerbated by the limited esteem the manager held learners due to the temporary nature of their association with the company. Also in the absence of key strategic positioning of the project and the active promotion of the project by the project champion there was little to increase the perception of the value of the learners on the project

5. Conflict and exclusion – learners who perpetually raised issues for the managers and found events that made them feel excluded were eventually excluded by the workplace practice because they created the impression that they were difficult to manage or would not fit in
6. Pregnancy - although not necessarily an issue from a learning perspective, the fact that four learners fell pregnant after enrolling on the project had serious management implications. However, it impacted the learner's employability since they were not able to gain as much work experience as their colleagues. This is evident when a Manager's assessment of the learner indicated that she was not work-ready and requires further development.

In addition the study highlights that many sites indicated that they were capable of supporting learning and were prepared to adapt to ensuring learning in addition to providing extra training where required. What was evident is that for many managers, learning had not yet permeated their conversations and they needed to pay special attention to learning requirements of the project in order to develop a culture of learning as these processes and practices were not yet part of the norm.

Finally almost all learners felt that the programme enhanced their employability. Managers also felt that the skills and ability for learners to contribute productively in a workplace had improved and as such it is possible to say that the WIL programme did enhance the learners' employability. Part of the contribution the workplace makes is its relentless emphasis on quality and precision without relieving the pressure thereby forcing learners to pay closer attention and develop clearer thinking skills. The study however also highlighted that the learner's individual agency (as determined by their personality, motivation and attitude) was important in determining their employability.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The pivotal insights which emerged from this study are that:

- The work experience and subsequent learning can be **shaped** by creating an environment that is **supportive of learning**;
- The work experience becomes meaningful if it **connects** the learners to the workplace by providing the support to enable them to participate fully in workplace processes and practices;
- **Relationships** are important and encourages the necessary support, in that learning in the workplace is mediated by people;
- Work integrated learning is an adaptive process between the stakeholders making **information** and feedback important at developing the learner's specialisation;
- **Participants** need to be empowered, workplaces need to be ready and have the capacity in order for both learners and employees to become engaged in the process and maximise the benefit they receive; and
- Extending **trust** to the learners serves as the stimulus for transformation in the learners, in that it communicates a perceived confidence in their abilities.

This **SCRIPT** (**S**hape, **C**onnect, **R**elationships, **I**nformation, **P**articipants, **T**rust) for workplace experience in WIL is discussed in more detail.

The workplace experience *can be shaped*. In this study the learners' experience was shaped by the approach the managers chose to take. The manager who took the time to understand the programme and identify a comprehensive strategy for developing that knowledge was able to produce candidates that found work even outside the host employer. Although the manager did not predetermine every experience, she grew the learners' ability to cope in each step. A significant component in shaping the learning experience is finding a balance between the manager maintaining control and providing the opportunity to make mistakes, because as Billet (2012) observes, much of the process of learning at work is *"comprised of making mistakes and learning from them even incrementally or*

transformationally" (Billet 2012, p. 25) . Also, the learning experience is not shaped so much by an actual event or activity, but more by the environment the manager creates through their response to mistakes, the way they prepare the learner for a task, the people they involve and the feedback they provide.

The workplace experience seems to have greater value and becomes meaningful if it *connects* the learner to the workplace, the extent to which it *"affords opportunities for individuals to participate"* (Billet 2004, p. 109) That is, workplace experience is of greater value for the unemployed learner if it develops their understanding of workplace practice, and the context of the organisation rather than being focused only on meeting the curriculum objectives or developing a practical understanding of the theory. In fact, it seems to be a necessity for the workplace experience to extend beyond the programme requirements to meet the workplace and learner expectations.

Relationships became a key factor in this project. Those learners who were able to build strong relationships with their managers, or create a network of relationships with other staff, were able to identify or be given more opportunities to contribute. This makes it important to provide "*time and space for social exchanges*" (Borzillo, Schmitt & Antino 2012, p. 9) remaining focussed on the process of interaction rather than the content of the interaction – this is especially true when it comes to managing conflicts that may arise in the workplace, where it becomes more important to understand how the conflict arose than what it was about – and a similar emphasis is placed on the process through which it is resolved.

One of the most powerful findings in this study is that work integrated learning is an adaptive process between the stakeholders. This meant that rather than accepting the initial plans and understanding as fixed, there is a need to continually check-in with each other – adapting and adjusting to ensure that the agreed objectives are met. This makes it important to have a way of sharing **information** and provide feedback. The benefit of creating such an information flow is that it creates a *"sense of security"* and develops a more *"realistic assessment"* (Norman & Hyland 2003, p. 11) of the learners' performance and capability.

Participants need to be empowered. This essentially follows from the need to ensure that all stakeholders become engaged in the process of learning and each other for the most beneficial WIL outcome to be achieved. This links to the reasoning by Casey (2001) that by removing some of the control structures and giving people room to collaborate (as happens in teams) it is possible to *"generate a heightened sense of empowerment, commitment and collective responsibility"* (Casey 2001, p. 22) This sense of working collectively towards a goal creates the most engagement; and

Trust or creating the perception of trust is important for the learners' development. By creating the situation where the learner feels trusted they feel that they are seen as capable which grows their confidence (Norman & Hyland 2003, p. 9). The increased confidence leads to a sense of feeling more capable which increases their participation and the learner is suddenly seen as more proactive and capable.

Some of the factors about the organisational environment that surprised me during the study were:

- The extent to which the importance of good and frequent communication is overlooked by managers of different divisions and their teams when they have different work priorities. In this study it was particularly evident that the project champion had a more complete and detailed vision for how to manage the development of the apprentices within the organisation. He also visualised the WIL learners participating in the study as contributing to the process of filling a gap he identified in the organisation. However, due to time constraints, this vision was not adequately communicated.
- There was an overwhelming response by the managers that they wanted to participate in another project since they understood and experienced a work integrated learning programme better after having participated in one during this study.
- Although some studies (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 47) have shown that workplaces prefer to participate in apprenticeships rather than learnerships in South Africa, this was not the case in this project. In fact managers were keen to be monitored and to report on their performance during the WIL learnership process.

In presenting the conclusions of the study, it must be emphasised that although there were four sub research questions, each major finding is not restricted to data from only question but rather from a

combination of themes that emerged from one or two questions. The conclusions are listed in order of priority.

5.1 Conclusion 1: WIL is Collaborative in Nature

This study clearly demonstrates that participating in a WIL programme is different from providing work experience, and that what is required from all stakeholders is to build a *partnership for learning* and a *learning partnership*. This means that building a partnership for learning is about finding ways in which the learners, workplace and training institute can collaborate to achieve particular learning objectives, and creating a learning partnership is about accepting that change is part of any project. Therefore opportunities for reflection, adjustment and improvement need to be incorporated into the WIL project.

This means, **there is a need for collaboration at various levels in the organisation.**

The need for a more collaborative approach at various levels in the organisation was clearly identified as an overarching conclusion and comes from identifying the consequences for not working together and working on the basis of different expectations, as identified in sub-research question 1.

This study clearly showed that it is necessity to **build relationships with and within the workplace** and that a single touch-point or contact person between the institution and the workplace is insufficient. The workplace needs to become an active partner in WIL co-managing the programme on a strategic and operational level. It is also important to involve and engage the learner in the WIL process. This clearly indicates that **WIL is** a mutually beneficial **collaboration for learning,** between the three partners – with each involved in problem solving, managing and setting the direction in the programme; rather than a more passive cooperative agreement in which each concentrates simply on getting the job done.

While some expectations are shared there are a large number of those that are divergent. Hence, this study proposes a negotiated agreement from inception of the WIL project at three levels:

- a macro strategic level when the partnership agreement is signed. This involves a WIL contract, similar to a Learnership contract described earlier for this study, at a strategic level between the leadership of the ETD institution and the organisation;
- at a meso management level with managers at the workplace with academic staff of the specific discipline; and
- at a micro level so that a Workplace Learning Plan is signed and monitored between the individual learner and the workplace mentor, ensuring that there is a balance between the workplace tasks and curriculum implementation activities.

The macro strategic level agreement allows for a generic agreement that stipulates the roles and responsibility of each partner in the WIL project, the time frames involved in the contract and the expected outcomes of the contract. It should indicate the resources that need to be allocated from each party during the partnership. In essence, it describes “what is required” during the partnership.

The meso level agreement is targeted at the management level where consensus is reached during negotiations between the parties on operational matters. The “how” of the contract is negotiated and agreed upon. At this stage of the negotiations, the context of the workplace and the ETD institution needs to be well understood by both parties, ensuring that expectations of management on both sides are well understood. This allows institutions to build relationships with workplaces, provides sufficient opportunity for the institution to get a thorough understanding of context of the organisation and provides the necessary platform for successful implementation. The study indicates then there are fewer challenges with a shared understanding.

At the micro level, the development of a Workplace Learning Plan builds the understanding and relationship between learner and manager as mentor. It requires the learning outcomes to be stipulated in conjunction with workplace tasks and priorities that need to be considered. It is recommended that there be a balance of each for work and learning objectives to be met. Currently, WIL seems to have a focus on curriculum integration as the key objective of the partnership, which the study indicates “frustrates” the workplace when workplace activities are not given priority and deadlines need to be met.

The study showed that each worksite offered a different and unique set of learning opportunities and capacity for supporting the learning process. This means it becomes important to understand how the programme will fit into the specific worksites' way of working and the extent to which the people incorporate learning into their thinking and working practices.

Hence, the WIL process needs to build a *partnership for learning* and a *learning partnership*. Building a partnership for learning is about finding ways in which the learners, workplace and training institute can collaborate to achieve particular learning objectives, and creating a learning partnership is about accepting that change is part of any project and therefore opportunities for reflection, adjustment and improvement need to be incorporated into the project.

Other reasons for having agreements at three levels include:

- Checks for clarity and understanding between the stakeholders;
- Have meetings for collaboration;
- Understand context and get people together that are not on the same page;
- Use their expectations as part of the planning and preparation process. T

Managers in the study indicated that they wanted to be part of the planning and preparation process before the WIL project commences. It was clear that a once off induction session is not sufficient to understand the context and expectations of each partner involved in the WIL process. It is the relationship between two very different kinds of organisations with very different purposes of education and business, that requires a broader understanding of each one's purpose and how they need to come together to reach common objectives. It is only when there is synergy between the intent of both partners – as described by the DNA of WIL in the conceptual framework chapter – that the intertwining of workplace tasks and curriculum activities begin to take place. However, it is recommended that there must be a balance between meeting the objectives of the learning programme with the priorities of the workplace. This proposed balance can only take place through the involvement of managers at specific worksites together with managers and coordinators from the ETD institutions from inception of the work placement.

5.2 Conclusion 2: Socialisation and Integration

The study clearly shows that relationships are important for the success of a learner but also that integrating learners into the work place is difficult – partly due to the temporary nature of their employment and largely due to managers assuming that learners have little to offer. In cases where managers have taken away the expectation of performance and focussed on learning they have found that they are able to integrate the learners into a productive team.

Fundamentally the study finds that the **employability of learners is enhanced through socialisation and integration.**

On evaluating workplace processes, that is, how the workplace impacted on the employability of learners in sub-question three, it became clear that a requirement of the workplace on the learner is to learn to fit into the organisation. The study indicated that *learning to fit in* has three components:

- Expecting, adapting to change and recognising the opportunity in change;
- Being introduced to and understanding the work environment;
- Becoming part of the team.

The first change the new entrant has to adapt to is the difference between the narrative they have constructed about how the workplace operates and the reality of the workplace processes, especially given that some of their parents are unemployed, and they themselves have never held a job. This is major reason for recommending that it is necessary to help the learner understand the work environment. Jin (2014, p 425) proposes that employees are continually evaluating the gap they experience between their expectation (the workplace they imagine) and the reality in the context of the future aspirations or dreams. This ability to make sense of why it is important to adjust to the change or how the change could actually be of benefit, is critical for the individual to make an attempt at fitting in. In this regard both the workplace manager, the mentor, and the workplace team can assist and should assist the unemployed learners in this regard. The study found that when learners have limited assistance in the sense-making from their home environment and transitioning into the workplace, they feel isolated.

The second part of *learning to fit in* refers to the actions managers can take to make the learner more familiar with work environment. In this, project managers concentrated on a physical orientation to the workplace. However, during the closing interviews most managers mentioned that it was important to make learners aware of the rules and social expectations. Interesting to note, was that most workspaces have formal processes for including a new employee into the workspace using job shadowing or appointing a "work buddy" to help with any day-to-day issues they may experience, but they did not view learners as new employees and neglected to use these processes. This study showed that it was important to introduce learners to people inside and outside the unit in which they would be hosted in the organisation. Although peer-mentorship in the workplace was not explored, this could prove a useful mechanism to help the learner acclimatise to the workplace – as many learners found it useful to talk to the staff that they were assisting or completing similar tasks with. It is recommended that the benefits of team and peer mentorship be further explored.

The final aspect of *learning to fit in,* is becoming part of a team. Literature and this study agree that this is an informal social process. Literature indicates that for a community of practice, this process requires regular and quality contributions (Chang & Jacobs 2012, p. 356), pursuit of common objectives and working together (Cousin & Deepwell 2005, p. 60) in which case a common way of thinking, talking and doing develops (Cousin & Deepwell 2005, p. 60). However, there is limited understanding of how this happens. For the learners in this study, the challenges of this process involved getting to know key role players and influencers in the workplace, navigating "cliques". The informal "coffee conversations" assisted learners to become socialised into the organisation. However, the study indicated that the temporary nature of the placement has an impact where managers do not view learners as employees. With this view, the ambiguous role learners play in the organisation, will make it difficult for the learner to be integrated into the team. It is recommended that managers become aware of the need to integrate and socialise the learner into the workplace as would be done with any new employee so that learners gain acceptance into the work community.

5.3 Conclusion 3: Developing Workplace Capacity

One of the key conclusions to be made from this study is that WIL requires a shift in practice and thinking on two levels. Firstly, managers need to shift from a performance management perspective into a learning perspective. Secondly managers and institutions need to recognise that learning in the

workplace is advanced, as observed by Moore (Work-based learning and the Role of Managers 2010, p. 27) not in a *"content driven"* manner but rather in an *"inquiry based"* manner. This requires a change in approach to how WIL programme curricula are integrated with workplace practice and learners need to be prepared to ask questions and look for the information they need in the workplace.

The study also indicates significant benefit to capacitating and preparing the workplace for the WIL programme before learners are placed for work integrated learning. This allows learners to have a smoother transition into the workplace – making them more receptive to guidance and support from the worksite. WIL represents a collection of approaches and strategies which mix training and work experience around a planned curriculum. Curricula need to include content that hold value to workplace managers. This will deepen the partnership into a joint training solution.

Building the capacity of the workplace for learners to work and learn in teams.

The study indicated that workplaces were not prepared for learners coming into the organisation as new entrants. Since the study included nine work sites, each independent of the other, within two groups of companies, the need to build the capacity of the workplace may also apply to other companies in South Africa in general. Although, one of the employers participating in the study, has received Top Employer certification for 2015 and the employer is described as providing *"exceptional employee conditions, nurturing, developing talent throughout all levels of the organisation and has demonstrated its leadership status in the HR environment"* (Top Employer, 2015), it became evident that the implementation of WIL is very specific to work and learning in collaboration with an ETD institution.

Hence, it cannot be assumed that workplaces are automatically prepared for learners coming into the workplace. In addition, the study reviewed the culture of learning as the extent to which learning had permeated people's thinking, conversations and the organisational processes. From this, each of the worksites proved very dissimilar with managers emphasising or accommodating learning in different ways. The similarities amongst the differences were however an emphasis on efficiency and productivity, and a preference for working collaboratively and cooperatively in teams.

Thus, it becomes important to design the WIL implementation model as a solution to meet the needs of both employer and the learner. For the workplace that means:

- Evaluating the fit between the workplace and the learning opportunities required for the programme. Good planning and preparation for the first implementation of WIL becomes necessary;
- Explaining and even negotiating the purpose of the WIL programme with the managers helping them shape "what and how" needs to be met in the strategic context of why it is being done;
- Extending the management and facilitation of learning in the worksite beyond a to-do list, but rather assisting managers to identify and shape the learning environment and opportunities. This means creating space, time and routines for learning which includes meeting, observing, discussing, sharing insights and applying what is known (Nonaka & Konno 1998, pp. 41-47; Tynjälä 2009, pp. 29-30). Solomon, et al (The in-between: exposing everyday learning at work 2006, p. 12) warn against making these processes too formal but stress that it is the "*in-betweenness*" of the workplace "*that provides productive potential*". Thus, it is less about creating a learning process and more about creating the space to exploit opportunities for reflection, joint problem-solving and debate.

It is recommended that the worksite, once they have been empowered and reach a position of deep understanding of WIL, also take ownership of the learning process within the workplace and not remain dependent on the ETD institution.

At the same time, it becomes important to prepare learners for the workplace context and working practices. For the learner this means realising that:

- The workplace mentors and managers are not teachers. Meaning that not all interactions will be structured and planned or progressive. Much learning will be ad hoc as the opportunity presents itself. Neither the learner nor the manager or team member will "*think of it as learning*" (Boud, Rooney & Solomon 2009, p. 326);
- The process of learning in the workplace differs from an institutional training programme in that the learning process itself is "*inquiry based*" (Moore 2010, p. 27) this requires the learners to take ownership of their learning process and look for the information and support they require

rather than expecting someone to guide them or instruct them on what to do. The rule of thumb along which the workplace operates is that if the person does not understand they will ask;

- Learners require coping mechanisms to deal with diversity of opinions, beliefs and approaches. Most of the learners in the study felt daunted by the diversity of the workplace and had not realised the variety of people and personalities they would meet. Helping the learner to accommodate the tension that results in the workplace both "*celebrating productive diversity*" and "*upholding a set of norms*" (Solomon, 2001, p. 125), means that employers need to be made aware of the dilemma learners may face. It also means that fundamentally employers need to help the new entrants to the organisation accept and understand the "*team concept*" and "*speak team kind of language*" (Solomon, 2001, p. 124), so that they can learn to work with people who are different to them and hold different views.

Finally, this study raises certain doubts about the assumption that all workplaces could become WIL or learning spaces. Some managers have claimed not to have the time or inclination to "babysit learners" in the workplace. For these worksites, it may not mean that building their capacity to act as mentors to support learners will lead to their willingness to participate adequately in the WIL partnership. To this end, I recommend that further investigation of whether every workplace can be turned into a learning space given the right approach and preparation in building the capacity of the workplace, be undertaken.

5.4 Conclusion 4: Confidence and Self-Esteem

The study indicates that a critical part for an individual learners' success is building their sense of agency. That means building their confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. This is particularly important when working with unemployed graduates.

It is critical to build the learner's self-esteem to increase the perception of their competence and thereby their employability.

The requirements of the workplaces were such that the learners were expected to do more than "*complete the task given*" (Manager 12). Learners were expected to be "*interactive*" (Manager 1). The need to appear self-confident and demonstrate good self-esteem was just as important. The learners

themselves realised that this was important to create the impression of *knowing* and that a lack of self-confidence created the impression of *not knowing*.

For Boud and Molloy (2013, p. 705) this begins in viewing the learners as "*elicitors of knowledge for improvement*" and capable in "*driving their own learning*". Affording or building a sense of agency within the learner is important since this means helping them become proactive in their learning and at work. In the study some learners started with the conviction to make the most out of the programme, and maximised their engagement with all employees they came into contact with, from the beginning. This "*outgoing and interactive*" (Manager1) nature was recognised by all as exemplary.

In addition it means improving the learner's resilience by preparing the learners for "*unpleasant, confronting and unhelpful experiences*" (Billett & Choy 2013, p. 272).

Others took a while at being able to frame the experience in a way that enabled them to be more proactive at building relationships, finding help and demonstrating value. This proactive stance presented itself in learners who were able to manage their days, tasks and learning. In addition, learners who demonstrated greater self-awareness, including recognising and acknowledging their own role in their successes or failures also seemed to appear self-confident. Some managers promoted this through the process they adopted in setting goals and providing feedback on the tasks completed – developing the ability of the learners to judge their own performance. That is, the manager's goal in her feedback was not so much correcting mistakes but more of enabling the learners to evaluate their own work in seeing the action of *"feedback as self-regulating"* (Boud & Molloy, 2013, p. 706).

Developing this competency, then allows the manager to allocate work with confidence and continue shaping the development of the learner by "*encouraging inquiry and supporting improvisation*" (Fenwick, 2008, p. 236) moving to controlling the work environment rather than the learner, allowing the learner to work independently and thereby growing their confidence and self-esteem further.

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5.5 Conclusion 5: Matching the Mentoring Approach to the Learner

As discussed different managers adopted different approaches, **these different coaching and mentoring approaches which shape the learning experience and how learners respond.**

Fuller, et al (2007, p. 745) identify that there is a continuum of approaches supporting workforce development and I observed the same in this study. Learners responded to managers that guided them through learning and what they needed in the workplace. This nurturing, supportive and risk taking approach, increases the self-esteem of learners and in turn increases confidence leading to a positive cyclical effect. This is consistent with findings from Coetzer (2007 p. 430) who indicates that managers play an important role in "*fostering learning*" for newcomers and who also value on-the-job training more than employees with more experience.

At this stage it seems important to consider the characteristics of the learner and the personality of and approach the manager takes, to supporting learning before the learner placement is made, ensuring that there is a fit between both. It would be important to understand how the approach of a manager would suit the type of learner in order to develop the required or desired skills. For example, an impatient manager would not work well with a learner who is introverted, works slowly and lacks confidence. This would affect the learning process adversely. It is suggested that this type of learner would require a more nurturing approach. In addition, alerting managers to adjust to a new role of encouraging and empowering people as opposed to controlling resources could prove useful in this context. Finding ways of transitioning learners between managers to play to the manager's strengths and expose learners to different management approaches and priorities should also be explored.

5.6 Conclusion 6: Employability Subjectivity

Employability remains a subjective and highly contextual matter

This study confirmed that the assessment of an individual learner's employability remains a subjective and highly contextual matter. Employability means different things to different employers, even different managers within the same employer, depending on the requirements of the worksite at the time. Employability requirements differ between employers – there is no one size fits all, the managers value the particular experience gained and the practical knowledge of quality, speed and awareness of the business context most. Each site had a slightly different assessment of what would make someone employable – ranging from being proactive, showing initiative, being self-driven, with a willingness to learn and adapt to teams and the work environment.

Essentially this study raises doubt at the sufficiency and applicability of generic workplace readiness programmes. There is a need for more research in this area, specifically around exploring **how** other work readiness workshops or bolt-on employability programmes shape someone's employability and how effective they are, especially when considering the long term employability and career success of an individual.

5.7 Conclusion 7: Learner Background

The background of the learner does not influence employability.

There are certain assumptions that people make about unemployed learners and the background they come from. This study did not look at specifically the learner's socio-economic background and therefore cannot make conclusive statements about the role the socio-economic background plays in the WIL processes. However, since the study looked at WIL as a mechanism to improve employability and in that context there are some things that need to be considered such as:

- A lack of family and friends' support in encouraging the learner to further their studies, mean that learners need to be motivated and have significant self-drive. In addition, the narrative of a

potential career must be stronger without creating unreasonable expectation. This may include understanding how the learners define success or what responsibilities they are expected to meet given their home environment.

- The lack of information and support in deciding what to study needs further exploration since it was not part of this study.
- Unemployed graduates struggle with a lack of support in finding employment.
- Transport issues result from the historical isolation of townships from the work corridors. This may not been fully addressed by the new infrastructure development plans that South Africa has made. Thus, transport needs to be considered both when thinking about the training and work placement venues. Although it may not always be possible to accommodate learners with placement close to home, there may be other support networks that could be considered, such as, considering linking learners to employees who live close to the township that they come from. The physical distances and difficulties associated with getting to the workplace need to be taken into consideration by employers when unemployed graduates are placed for workplace experience during WIL and the time of arrival at work.

Fundamentally, this study has shown that each learner has the potential to succeed regardless of their background if they were only given a chance.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary the conclusions reached by this study were:

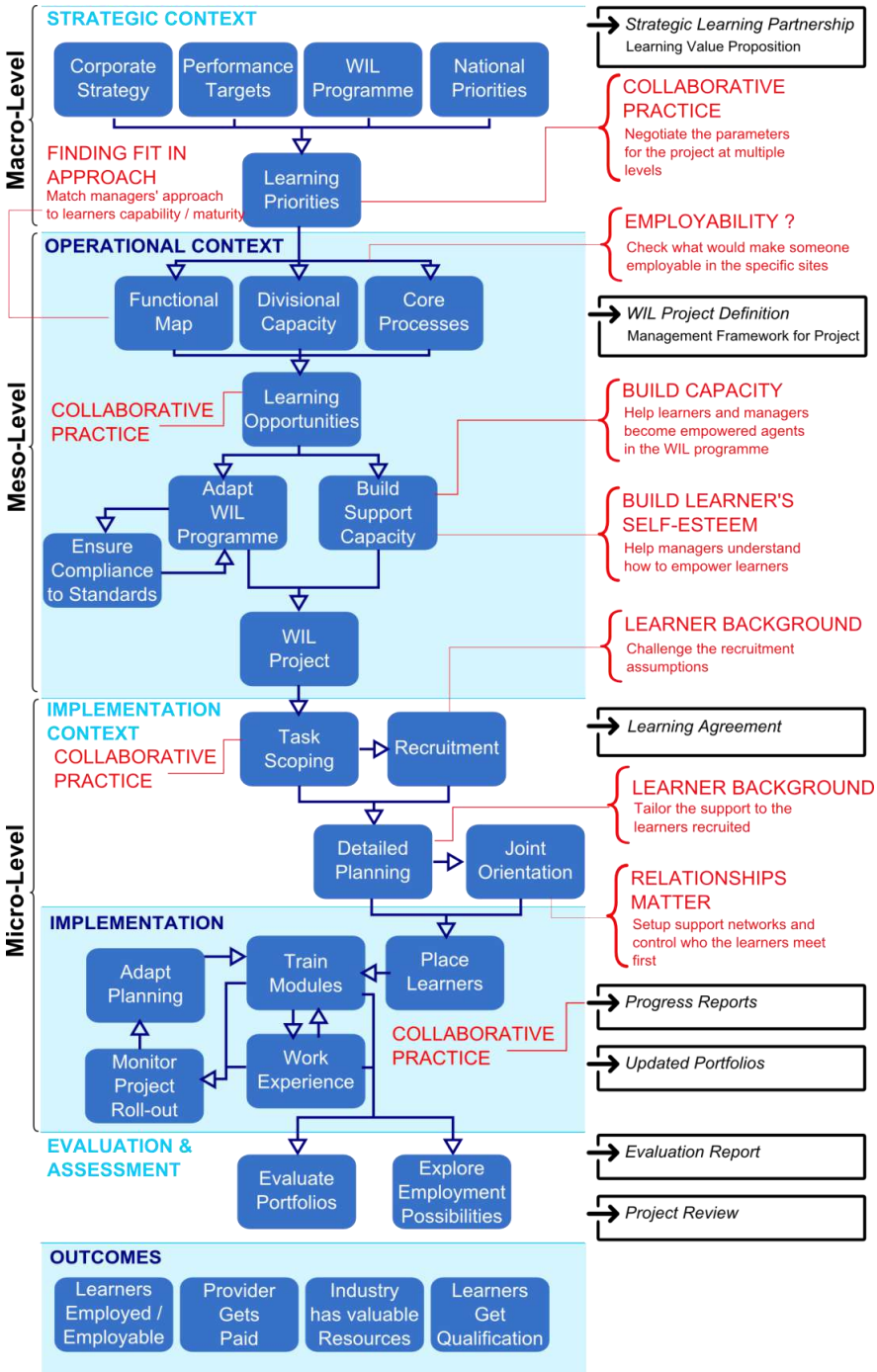
- That WIL is collaborative in nature;
- Relationships in the workplace between the learner and the team and manager are important and as such integration and socialisation into the workplace play a pivotal role in WIL;
- Workplaces need to be capacitated to participate in WIL in order to find an appropriate way of supporting the learner's development in the workplace. This includes:
    - Building learner's individual sense of agency through building their confidence and self-esteem.
    - Helping managers understand how to socialise and integrate the learners in the workplace.
    - Adjusting to a learning mindset and finding appropriate feedback mechanisms that support the learner's development.
- Employability remains subjective which means it becomes more important to understand the specific context of the organisation with whom the WIL programme is being deployed than focussing on a generic skills list
- Learners respond to being given a chance more than any other factor in their background or education. Thus finding ways of bridging the learner from whatever background becomes more important than developing detailed selection criteria.

These insights have resulted in a radically different implementation model being developed and this is encompasses all the conclusions above.

6.1 The Revised WIL Implementation Model

Figure 33, represents a revised WIL Implementation model. It explicitly illustrates the details of the WIL programme at three levels of the organisation.

FIGURE 33: THE RAJAB WIL IMPLEMENTATION MODEL (2015)



At the Macro-level within a strategic context, a strategic partnership between the training institute and the workplace organisation is established. Again, this is based on understanding the workplace strategic objectives and performance targets as they relate to a specific WIL programme or particular developmental objectives the workplace may have. At this stage, based on the understanding that each WIL project and programme expands learning opportunities, it is considered prudent to incorporate the guiding principles for post-school education (Gibbon, Muller & Nel 2012, pp. 133-134) and especially sector specific imperatives into the strategic framework for the project. This means that the strategic partnership values the role the organisation plays in the sector or industry it operates within. For example, this study was based within the automotive industry in which there is a shortage of apprentices. Strategic WIL partnerships would seek to ensure that relevant programmes are initiated to meet the skills shortages within the automotive sector in line with the strategic intent of the organisation. Agreement at this level is formalised into a strategic partnership and a list of particular learning priorities that the partnership should address through collaboration, is well understood.

At the Meso-level these priorities are operationalised. Firstly, by building a thorough understanding of the operational environment of the organisation, including understanding how the organisation functions. Important here is to challenge the familiar view of organisations in terms of its organogram which typically represents only *"responsibility (who is responsible for what) and authority (who reports to whom)"* (Gharajedaghi 2011). Another important parameter to assess is the divisional capacity. Will managers have time to provide the necessary support? Are there other staff members who could or should be involved? To what extent would those people require additional training or workshops to develop the necessary skills and awareness for them to be able to support the programme?

Understanding the context of the specific workplace, the Meso-level partnership agreement is signed between managers from the institution and the host employer. The employability requirements are stated and well understood from inception of the WIL project. Managers are involved in extensive planning and preparation meetings and prospective learners are matched with managers with suitable approaches as mentors or managers who will be accountable for progress and success. The particular learning opportunities to be given priority and utilised are then incorporated into an adapted WIL programme and an accompanying capacity building plan, which is to accompany the WIL programme

so that managers and other staff develop the necessary capabilities to support WIL programmes in the future.

The details of the final WIL project are agreed and summarised in an agreement governing the implementation and scope of the particular WIL project to be rolled out at the worksite.

Finally, at the Micro-level, it is about understanding the core processes through which work is achieved and how the business works. This analysis is combined into an assessment of the learning opportunities and possible work opportunities (through partnership or additional capacity including skills) that are available for the site.

A Learning Plan is agreed upon with the individual learner and the responsible manager who delegates various learning opportunities to a team or other employees in the organisation. At this stage, the formation of relationships for integration and socialisation are imperative. The outcome of this refinement of the planning within the project gives rise to a learning agreement which becomes tailored to each worksite with learner pairing.

At the Micro-level, it becomes important to transition into an implementation mode where particular tasks to be completed for each worksite are identified and the specific learners are recruited. In the study many managers wanted to participate in the recruitment process – it is important to consider that there may be value in the worksites step outside of their hiring comfort zones so that access to opportunities for the unemployed or other marginalised groups is ensured.

At every level of the WIL implementation process, collaboration must take place, whilst bearing in mind that the purpose of the WIL project is to ensure that learners' employability is enhanced.

Once learners have been recruited the detailed planning for each site can begin and an orientation and induction process can be started for managers and learners, so that a mutually negotiated basis for what is actually to be done, by whom and with what intent can be established upfront and a shared vision for the project can be achieved.

The implementation of the actual project hold only one change in that the project roll-out is more closely monitored and it is anticipated that small adjustments and refinements to the project be made as the learner and the workplace grow and change. Finally, in this project or other projects designed to build learners employability, it is considered necessary to incorporate exploring hiring / employment possibilities as part of the evaluation of the project and not just an evaluation of the portfolio of evidence of workplace implementation.

It is hoped that this model for WIL implementation will provide better direction for practitioners of WIL as well as employers.

6.2 Further Research

Possible areas for further development and research would be:

- To implement a WIL project using the new proposed model in order to investigate its effectiveness;
- To investigate the particular role of team-based and peer-mentorship for a WIL project. This would offer useful guidelines to those wanting to support WIL projects since most studies focus on mentorship provided by an individual;
- To investigate whether the duration of a WIL programme impacts on employability since the data suggests it's about getting to know the learner and building confidence in the learner's ability to make a meaningful contribution – it seems in this project, the duration of the WIL programme (one year) seemed to be an advantage;
- To investigate the assumption that every workplace can become a learning space.

6.3 Final Conclusion

The assumption made at the beginning of this research study that workplace experience will enhance employability, has proven to be correct. However, the application of WIL is complex and has many workplace challenges. There is a need for a balance between meeting the demands of the workplace and meeting the learning objectives of a specific programme offered by education, training and development institutions. It has become evident in this study that workplaces are not ready to receive learners; that they do not think to integrate them into the organisation and guide and support learners

through their learning processes. It requires specific capacity building and resources within the organisation to embark and continue on a well negotiated WIL agreement at various levels within the organisation. However, the study has also confirmed that workplaces do have the potential to enhance employability through a very deliberate and guided approach.

Learners' employability increased if they were able to connect to the work team and manager. In the study, it became apparent that as managers and the learners developed a stronger relationship, managers became more invested in the employability and the employment of the learner. Adaptation to the work environment and making a contribution to the work team became more important than the particular technical competency. Again, this comes from knowing the context of the organisation, how teams work and better preparation of learners through this process.

It also became obvious from the study that in South Africa vocational and academic boundaries remain strong as proposed by Keevy (The National Qualifications Framework in South Africa: 1995 to 2013 2013, p. 30) and the synergies required between institutions and workplaces to create what this study highlights as the "DNA of WIL" requires more than just a policy thrust. Despite having qualifications, registered on the National Qualifications Framework (Office of the Presidency 2009), which incorporate both the academic and the workplace component, the study has shown that academia and work continue to operate in parallel worlds. Far more advocacy and capacity building of employers are required for policy, such as those proposed in the White paper (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013) to become a reality. This means that careful consideration must be given to the curriculum, which must include how learning in the workplace will be supported and managed and by whom, as proposed by (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden 2010, p. 106), making this a policy issue. It is further recommended that due consideration must be given to include the possibility of allowing general knowledge application as part of the curriculum to be implemented in the workplace without being too prescriptive on the outcomes of the qualification, allowing the much desired need for a balance between work (as required by managers in the workplace) and learning (as required by the ETD institution).

Finally, the insights gained from this study have allowed me to reflect on my current practice of implementing WIL programmes. It has enhanced my understanding of the dynamics in the workplace

and the way in which future WIL programmes will be conducted. It is hoped that the application and implementation of the proposed **Rajab WIL implementation model** will further improve WIL praxis in the future and that the findings of this study will inform policy development in respect of WIL to assist both employers and education and training institutions to implement the practice meaningfully.

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