

## CHAPTER 5: SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I offer my understanding of the participating SDFs' perceptions of the effects of the implementation of the SDA on staff development in HEIs, based on the data analysis (Chapter 4). Firstly I offer a synoptic overview of the study (§5.2) to briefly sketch the outline of this study. I then examine the data (Chapter 4) against the background of Human Capital Theory and Social Capital Theory (§5.3). I also sketch the implications for research, policy and practice (§5.4). The chapter concludes with a contemplative appraisal of the SDA in relation to the HEIs, including suggestions regarding the way forward (§5.5).

### 5.2 Synoptic overview of the study<sup>90</sup>

My research focused on a single unit of analysis: the participating SDFs' perceptions of the effects of the implementation of the SDA on staff development in HEIs. My study was therefore framed as a critical interpretative approach to:

- determine the nature and rationale of and reasons for staff development;
- determine the nature and rationale of and reasons behind the SDA;
- determine empirically how the SDFs perceive the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs; and
- develop an emancipatory critique of staff development in HEIs against the backdrop of the SDA.

In Chapter 1, I explained the rationale for this study, which evolved from an initially personal to an abiding academic interest in determining the perceptions of the participating Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs) regarding the implementation of the Skills Development Act (SDA) in South African public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In order to locate this study in the context of South African HEIs, a brief overview is given of the rise of the SDA in South Africa and staff development in

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<sup>90</sup> The synoptic overview (§5.2) might seem irrelevant to the significance and implications of this study. It is my personal preference, however, to provide the reader a synoptic overview of this study to demonstrate that each chapter contributed towards my attempt to document the significance and implications of this study that would be offered in this chapter.

HEIs (refer §1.5). In the same chapter I explained my use of terminology and also introduced my research design and methodology as being positioned within a critical interpretivist paradigm. Chapter 1 concluded with my assessment of some of the anticipated constraints of the study and an outline of its macrostructure.

My exploration of the review of the body of scholarship, as reported in Chapter 2, indicates how I reached an understanding of the underlying theoretical basis of the implementation of the SDA and that of staff development in HEIs. Chapter 2 concludes by tabling and comparing the underlying reasons, aims and theoretical underpinning of staff development in HEIs with those of the implementation of the SDA.

In Chapter 3 I provide details of my research design and its theoretical underpinning, motivating my choice of a participatory research methodology (including a description of the various instruments used for data collection) in the critical<sup>91</sup> qualitative research domain. In addition, this chapter contains a full description of the research strategies, participants (SDFs) and support systems as well as my personal role in this study. Then I report on the instrumentation and the data collection process that commenced with semi-structured interviews. I interviewed and gathered relevant documentation from the seven participating SDFs (from seven HEIs in the Gauteng Province). As the volume of unstructured data I had collected called for a more systematic and efficient method of data analysis, I used the software package *Atlas.ti*<sup>TM</sup> for the purpose of data analysis. This qualitative data analysis package (*Atlas.ti*<sup>TM</sup>) served to consolidate the non-empirical and empirical data in two data units, hence facilitating the data analysis. Using *Atlas.ti*<sup>TM</sup> was, therefore, one of the methods I employed to enhance the validity of my study.

In Chapter 4 I present the research findings revealed by an inductive analysis of the research data. Firstly, an account of the non-empirical data analysis is presented (referred to as phase one of data analysis). Six main families emerged which were relevant to understanding the reasons, meaning and theoretical assumptions pertaining to the implementation of the SDA and those of staff development in HEIs. The main families were (i) the documented opinions about the rationale for and meaning of implementing the SDA in SA; (ii) the documented opinions about the



rationale for and meaning of HEIs' employee ETD practices; (iii) the documented opinions about the challenges facing HEIs with the implementation of the SDA; (iv) personal opinion about the rationale for and meaning of implementing the SDA in SA; (v) personal opinion about the rationale for and meaning of HEIs' employee ETD practices; and (vi) personal opinion about the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. Each of these families consisted of various themes substantiating each family, comprising a total of 45 themes. In the second phase of the data analysis process, I presented the empirical data in accordance with the 45 themes, to substantiate the similarities and/or differences between the non-empirical and empirical data. By presenting the data analysis per SDF, I indicated the similarities or differences in opinions among the SDFs. I also indicated where the findings of the data analysis per SDF were not substantive, also indicating where I had discussed a particular theme (issue) during a focus group discussion. The findings of the focus group analysis therefore substantiate the response of the focus group intervention as a collective SDF voice, either to indicate whether a difference of opinion remained or whether consensus was reached about a certain theme.

The aim of this chapter is to convince the reader that I have “uncovered sufficient reliable indications that the knowledge claim is the best of the available alternatives” (Polkinghorne, 1983:259). I will now examine the data in the context of the theoretical framework of this study.

### **5.3 Examining the data in the context of the theoretical framework**

I present in this section my nuanced findings pertaining to the broad questions of this research (refer §5.2). I now present my findings pertaining to the first broad question of this research: the nature and rationale of and reasons for staff development in HEIs.

#### **5.3.1 The nature and rationale of and reasons for staff development in HEIs**

The findings substantiate that the nature and rationale of and reasons for staff development in HEIs are to further the individual's knowledge and skills so as to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education towards providing a quality service (refer §4.3.1.1, Figure 4.8). Staff development practices are therefore

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<sup>91</sup> Critical refers to researchers who are concerned about social inequalities and who are aimed at positive social change (Carspecken, 1996: 3).



aimed at enhancing an employee's task-specific knowledge and skills (refer §4.3.2.4, Figure 4.14). To this end, HEIs have implemented employee performance management systems as means of capturing the ETD needs of employees (refer §4.3.2.4, Figure 4.14). The funding of ETD practices is, in fact, approved when it is perceived as benefiting the HEI. Two SDFs (of the seven participants in the group) argued, however, that their respective HEI supported their employee ETD practices even when these were not perceived as being to the benefit the HEIs (refer Figure 2.14). With the possible exception of this last conclusion, the data analysis clearly substantiates the argument that the rationale of and reasons for HEIs' employee practices are to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the individual towards satisfying institutional needs (primarily to benefit the HEI). In other words, it seems that the reason why HEIs support (pay *vis-à-vis* invest) employee ETD practices is so that they could reap the assumed economic benefit of the ETD investment. I contend that the rationale for HEIs' employee ETD practices is firmly embedded in the core logic of Human Capital Theory, postulated by authors such as Livingstone (2002:1); MacIntyre (2002:1); Baptiste (2001:185); Shaik (2001:21) and Field (2004:12) (refer Chapter 2, §2.5). The line of thought in Human Capital Theory is that employees (in this case HEIs' employees) are regarded as a resource to be combined with other resources (ETD, capital and technology), which could be used as productive activities for the economic benefit of HEIs (Harrison and Kessels, 2004:21 and 88; Reid *et al.*, 2004:3; Svendsen *et al.*, 2004:11). Baptiste (2001:187) contends that the economic orientation to humans implicitly demonstrates how humans have become torn away from self-preservation only to be viewed mechanistically as part of a much larger chain of production. Another fact contributing to the notion that HEIs consider their employees as mere resources (as previously contended) is that the term "Human Resource(s) Development" seems to be gaining greater popularity in HEIs. Two of the seven participating HEIs do in fact refer to their employee ETD practices as Human Resource(s) Development (refer §4.3.4.2).

Considering, however, that only one of the seven participating SDFs explicitly mentioned that the rationale of and reason for staff development (*vis-à-vis* HEIs' ETD practices) were for economic gain, whereas the other six SDFs emphasised quality service, this tends to cast in the shade the underlying theoretical intent of HEIs' employee ETD practices in terms of Human Capital Theory. The SDFs did in fact stress that the nature of HEIs' employee ETD practices is self-determined and promoted by supporting continuous learning (refer §4.3.1.1, Figure 4.8 and §4.3.2.4, Chapter 5

Figure 4.14) which in turn leads to continuous education improvement. In other words, HEIs' support for continuous learning (emphasis on continuous learning) is perceived as the action that precedes performance management.

The context of HEIs' ETD practices can thus be positioned in the contemporary ambit of Human Capital Theory, which has close ties with the theory of Social Capital, on the basis of the following: that the rationale for HEIs' ETD practices is portrayed as an imperative to enhance quality service (not necessarily for economic gain only); that the nature of ETD practices is self-driven (self-motivated) (§4.3.2.1, Figure 4.11); that ETD practices are perceived as of value in the HEI's process of learning (§4.3.2.6, Figure 4.16) (not just as an act of continuous learning); that the majority of learning falls within the informal development category (§4.3.5.1, Figure 4.35); and that employee ETD needs are determined during interaction with someone else (during the performance management discussion) (refer §4.3.2.4, Figure 4.14).

The contemporary view of Human Capital Theory holds that investment in ETD, for example, is not necessarily a yardstick for economic growth. Instead, ETD enhances people's ability to cope with change, to think independently and to apply changing technologies in an organisational context as they deem fit (Baptiste, 2001:187). In addition, social capital is perceived to be the essential key to human capital since it is the interaction and relationships (especially of trust and tolerance) that endure (i.e. through the process of learning) and enable people to build communities, to commit themselves to one another (Field, 2003:1-2) and to share with one another (Fukuyama, 1996; 1999: passim), that subsequently trigger the individual to act (Crossley, 2006:286; Svendsen *et al.*, 2004:11,12 and 18; Collier, 2003:20; Gabby *et al.*, 2001:6; Lin, 1999:32). In other words, the primary value of ETD is recognised in its process of interaction and learning, not in the merits of attaining certification (a certificate, diploma or degree). I contend that Human Capital Theory, as the underlying conceptual rationale for HEIs' employee ETD practices, is overshadowed by the nature of HEIs' employee ETD practices, which seems to be leaning towards the theory of Social Capital for the following reasons:

- The implementation of performance management (refer quotations presented in §4.3.2.4, Figure 4.14): all seven of the participating SDFs corroborate, for example, the finding that interaction between employees and their senior colleagues is aimed at reflecting and jointly determining employees' ETD

needs. The data (§4.3.1.1 and §4.3.2.4) also substantiate the finding that performance management is not implemented to meet management's interests unilaterally, but that it is a process, instead, of engagement intended to enhance a culture of learning in HEIs.

- HEIs value the process of development. The results of the data analysis (§4.3.2.6, Figure 4.16) confirm the finding that HEIs (SDFs) value ***the process of learning*** as being of key importance to employee learning and development, and not, necessarily, the certification that the person receives after the successful completion of a programme (§4.3.4.3, Figure 4.30). One SDF, in fact, stated this eloquently:

Learning in itself is a process that cannot be placed in a linear or static box. The credentials that a person receives after completing a learning intervention and/or qualification are only as good as the depth and meaning of the learning and insights gained in the actual process. It is in the process of learning that an individual assimilates new concepts and insights, and undertakes reflection and self-evaluation. In the absence of high-quality experiential and relevant learning, the attainment of credentials just for the sake of receiving a certificate or commendation, becomes meaningless (P37: UT2:21, 197-204).

- Informal development is considered the most appropriate method of learning in HEIs (predominantly for an academic employee) (§4.3.2.6, Figure 4.16 and 4.18). As such, informal development (pursued by the majority of HEIs' employees) tends to pursue learning through a process of interaction and reflection (i.e. round-table debates, networking, mentoring or coaching) by and among individuals as a means of generating the knowledge that is key to HEIs' employee development.

In this section I have explained my findings with regard to the nature and rationale of reasons for staff development in HEIs. I will now, in the following section, discuss my nuanced findings of the nature and rationale behind the implementation of the SDA.

### **5.3.2 The nature and rationale behind the implementation of the SDA**

The participating SDFs perceive the rationale for the implementation of the SDA as the government's strategy first and foremost to redress the past imbalances caused by ETD practices/legislation during apartheid (refer §4.3.1.2, Figure 4.9). The SDFs perceive redress, however, as two different but interrelated remedies. One is that the development of designated employees in HEIs should be prioritised (refer §4.3.1.2, Figure 4.9). The other is that HEIs should invest in providing credentialled education,

training and development (ETD) programmes for designated employees (refer §4.3.1.2, Figure 4.9) (with the emphasis on credentialled ETD programmes). Secondly, the SDFs perceive the implementation of the SDA from a structural point of view – that the government, by implementing various structures inside and external to HEIs (e.g. the ETDP SETA) intends to govern HEIs' staff development practices (refer §4.3.1.2, Figure 4.9 and §4.3.1.3, Figure 4.10) with the aim of achieving the government's agenda of redress. The participating SDFs perceive government's agenda, however, as not ending with governing the HEIs' staff development context, but also as making HEIs become co-responsible for investment in the development of unemployed SA citizens.

I contend that the theory of Human Capital is, once again, the underlying conceptual rationale for the implementation of the SDA, and I do so for the following reasons:

- The participating SDFs in the seven HEIs perceive the SDA as labour oriented, driven from a labour imperative associated with manual and/or tangible skills, such as artisan skills and practical manual skills (refer §4.3.4.5, Figure 4.32). One SDF, in fact, stated this eloquently:

*Why is it called the Skills Development Act?* (Laughs) because it's labour driven and labour was talking from the background where people from designated groups needed skills like artisan skills (P32: RT2:10, 55-60).

The message conveyed by the above-mentioned SDF is that the SDA focuses predominantly on enhancing the individual's capacity for acquiring tangible skills associated with labour in the production chain, thus indicating its close reliance on Human Capital Theory, but not on the intangible skills that accrue with interaction (referred to as Social Capital – Chapter 2, §2.5.2).

- HEIs should invest in providing credentialled education, training and development (ETD) programmes for their employees. This is the core logic of Human Capital Theory. Livingstone (1997:9) argues: "Human Capital [Theory] equates workers' knowledge levels with their levels of formal schooling ... [to] estimate individual economic returns on learning". Lin (1999:29) postulates that the proponents of Human Capital Theory portray the value of investment in education as an ideology for influencing the masses to internalise the values of this theory. Lin (1999:29) argues that Human Capital Theory is a capitalist scheme embedded in society, where the dominant class calls for investment to be made in human beings to capture the surplus value



generated. Lin (1999:29), therefore, asserts that Human Capital Theory is based on "exploitative social relations between two classes". This implies that the government perceives HEIs' employees as mere resources to be combined with other resources (investment in ETD) which could then be utilised as productive activities for the economic benefit of South Africa.

- The exploitative characteristic of government is already visible in HEIs (in the context of Lin's (1999:29) postulation) as regards the appointment of SDFs, the implementation of committee structures, the submission of WSPs or ATRs to the ETDP SETA and HEIs' payment of a 1% payroll levy. In all seven participating HEIs, an SDF was either appointed or nominated after the implementation of the SDA (refer §4.3.1.3, Figure 4.10); all seven HEIs submit their WSPs or ATRs to the ETDP SETA (refer §4.3.1.3, Figure 4.10); all seven HEIs established committee structures (as consultation mechanisms regarding ETD practices in HEIs) after the implementation of the SDA (refer §4.3.1.3, Figure 4.10); and lastly HEIs submit their WSPs and ATRs to the ETDP SETA with the aim of recouping their mandatory levy grant rebate which is equal to 50% of the 1% levy amount (1% of payroll) (Republic of South Africa, 1999:8; Republic of South Africa, 2004:1). In addition, the fact that 20% of HEIs' levy amount is forwarded to the National Skills Fund, by implication compels HEIs to be co-responsible for investment in the development of unemployed SA citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1999:8).

The rationale for and aim of staff development in HEIs (see §5.3.1) seems to have close ties with the theory of Social Capital. The contradiction, in this regard, is that government's epistemological view of staff development in HE in South Africa is that it is best understood within the conceptual parameters of Human Capital Theory (where employees are seen as mere replaceable cogs in the institutional machinery).

In this section I have explained my findings of the nature and rationale behind the implementation of the SDA. I will now, in the following section, present my nuanced findings pertaining to how the participating SDF's perceive the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs.



### **5.3.3 How do the SDFs perceive the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs?**

The participating SDFs perceive HEIs' ETD needs as differing from national imperatives (refer §4.3.3.2, Figure 4.21). The perceived dissonance relates to the broader aim of HEIs' employee ETD needs and the aims of the SDA. As such, the participating SDFs view the HEIs' employee ETD needs as dealing with the development of all employees towards meeting institutional needs, whereas the SDA deals solely with the development of designated employees. One SDF stated the effect of the dissonance as follows:

"I feel a certain sense of disquiet, even anxiety, about the dissonance between the skills emphasis of the DoL [Department of Labour], basically dictating ... standards for which we are held accountable. *Are you referring to the National Skills Development Strategy?* Yes. They are not interested in our development strategies (P28: UF2:7, 76-89)."

The dissonance between institutional and national ETD needs relates to a difference in rationale (explained in §5.3.1 and §5.3.2). The difficulties that SDFs therefore experience with integrating the requirements of the SDA in the HEIs' employee ETD programme context are as follows:

- The implementation of Learnerships is problematic. Only three HEIs have introduced Learnerships since the implementation of the SDA. As such, these Learnerships have only been introduced on a small scale (refer §4.3.3.5, Figure 4.24) and these Learnerships are either not regarded as focusing on HEIs' core functions (an artisan or a security Learnership is not part of the core business of an HEI), nor as falling under the core function of the ETDP SETA (SDFs encounter challenges with working across SETAs) (refer §4.3.3.5, Figure 4.24). The development and implementation of a teaching Learnership (core to the academic function of HEIs) are also considered problematic, since the minimum job requirement for an academic is based on the attainment of a certain formal qualification and not, for example, as some kind of endorsement on an existing teaching qualification (refer §4.3.3.5, Figure 4.24).
- The accreditation of short courses (HEIs' internally developed courses) is problematic. The SDFs' contention is that internal courses are not based on unit standards, as intended by the SDA. HEIs are inherently accustomed to

developing and presenting education programmes which are approved by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a subcommittee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The SDFs perceive, however, that the provision of HEIs' internal short courses under the umbrella of the CHE (since the quality assurance of short courses is a delegated function to HEIs) conflicts with the SDA's intention to present courses aligned to the unit standards of the National Qualifications Framework. The HEQC does not usually seem to recognise short courses developed on the basis of unit standards (refer §4.3.3.1, Figure 4.20). This implies that HEIs, as providers of education, should for their internal staff development practice have courses accredited with the education and training quality authorities (ETQAs) *vis-à-vis* SETAs and this creates further conflict.

In addition to the aforementioned dissonance that SDFs perceive, there are various other problems in the structural, technical and communicative domain, which hinder the implementation of the SDA as follows:

- The development of systems to capture HEIs' employee ETD practices is costly. In addition to the cost of developing these systems, there is the high cost of the ongoing maintenance of systems (based on regulatory changes) (refer §4.3.6.1, Figure 4.38).
- The planning and reporting time frame set in the SDA differs from the HEIs' actual ETD time frame (refer §4.3.6.6, Figure 4.4.3).
- Informal development is considered the most appropriate category of learning in HEIs. This finding concurs with the postulations of authors such as Knight *et al.* (2006:313), Steyn (2004:217), Cowan *et al.* (2004:448) and Wexley (2002:2). Informal learning, as determined in this study, is the least recorded (refer §4.3.5.1, Figure 4.3.5) category of learning in HEIs. Since informal development is not structured learning, not easily planned and takes place in faculties and departments or voluntarily by HEIs' employees, it is understandable that this form of development is not easily recorded, hence there is little or no reflection of it in HEIs' WSPs and ATRs. The inability to capture the informal development practices of HEIs could lead to HEIs' forfeiting their levy grant, based on the principle that all ETD practices should be planned and recorded to earn a levy grant, although HEIs find it almost impossible to record informal development.



- HEIs do not receive support and guidance from the ETDP SETA (refer §4.3.3.6, Figure 4.25) in respect of completing the ETDP SETA's WSP and ATR templates. The ETDP SETA does not offer meaningful feedback to HEIs regarding their submitted WSPs and ATRs (refer §4.3.3.6, Figure 4.25). The ETDP SETA structures furthermore do not support HEIs (i.e. there is a lack of skills advisers dedicated to HEIs in each of the nine SA provinces) (refer §4.3.3.3, Figure 4.22). In August 2008 there was one skills adviser for each province, advising on matters ranging from Early Childhood Development to political parties, labour organisations, trade unions, libraries and higher education. This finding matches the postulation of the authors Strydom (2004:292) and Van Niekerk (2004:111) that staff development in HEIs is being hampered by the lack of support and guidance from government through the ETDP SETA.
- The terminology in the SDA and the explanations offered by government officials are contradictory and confusing (refer §4.3.4.2, Figure 4.29).

The aforementioned dissonance and difficulties SDFs encounter with the integration of the SDA have the effect that HEIs submit their Workplace Skills Plans and Annual Training Reports solely to obtain grants (refer §4.3.3.4, Figure 4.23). This finding is in accordance with Le Grange's postulation (2004:1) that the general trend in HEIs is to recover as rebates their levy payments. HEIs do want to promote the aims of the SDA in their employee ETD practices (refer §4.3.1.2, Figure 4.9) but cannot promote it fully owing to the aforementioned difficulties that HEIs encounter. The SDFs state that in addition, HEIs fear that they may forfeit their mandatory levy rebate (refer §4.3.6.10, Figure 4.47).

In this section I have explained my findings pertaining to how the participating SDFs perceive the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. In the following section I provide an emancipatory critique of staff development in HEIs against the backdrop of the SDA.

### **5.3.4 An emancipatory critique of staff development in HEIs against the backdrop of the SDA**

Staff development in HEIs is one of their long-standing traditions, dating back to long before the implementation of the SDA (Fraser, 2005:158; Webb, 1996b:1). The

nature of staff development is perceived as self-determined to address both the needs and interests of employees and institutions towards achieving the broader educational goal of HEIs (Brew,1995b:4 and 91; Webb, 1996a:2; Le Grange (2004:91). The individual's (staff member's) motivation for attaining knowledge and skills is viewed as pivotal to the efficiency and effectiveness of HEIs' educational objectives, and the means of acquiring knowledge and skills is vested in the process of learning (Knight *et al.*, 2006:320; Kapp and Frick, 2006:4; Burt, 2005:11 and 93; Svendsen *et al.*, 2004:11). It is therefore understandable why the term “development” overshadows the term “training” in HEIs (Nisbit *et al.*, 1979:50; Jalling, 1979:218; Denton, 1995:30). The underlying conceptual rationale for HEIs' employee ETD practices has, therefore, close ties with Social Capital Theory (explained in § 5.3.1).

By contrast, the implementation of the SDA has close ties with the theory of Human Capital (explained in § 5.3.2). It is my conviction that the implementation of structures to manage HEIs' employee ETD practices as a consequence of the implementation of the SDA (refer § 4.3.1.3, Figure 4.10) changes the humanistic self-determined learning tradition in HEIs to a mechanistic approach to training. HEIs' employees are therefore being viewed as mere replaceable cogs in the institutional machinery, and hence being trained to pursue institutionally prescribed performance standards. This approach could hamper academic freedom. This contradicts the nature of HEIs' quest to generate knowledge (to push forward the frontiers of knowledge *vis-à-vis* standards and not to be subordinated to standards). The growing use of the terminology “human resource(s) development” for referring to staff development in HEIs is a sign that some HEIs consider their employees as mere resources that should only be managed to the benefit of the particular HEI. In this regard, it seems that HEIs would do well to understand the concept of Human Capital Theory before they use Human Resource(s) Development as an umbrella term for their employee ETD practices.

In recent years the implementation of the SDA has, however, brought staff development *vis-à-vis* skills development to the fore, leading to the introduction of structures to view holistically the budget for and quality assurance of such staff development. This is an indication that the nature of staff development in HEIs is steadily moving towards managing staff development mechanistically, which has close ties with the theory of Human Capital (refer §5.3.2). As regards skills development budgeting, however, the SDFs argue that if the SDA had not been



implemented, the skills funds available in HEIs would have been less than the amount currently available (refer §4.3.6.4, Figure 4.41). The funds that are available at the present juncture for HEIs' employee ETD practices are in fact less than the funds previously available, especially if viewed from a macro-institutional perspective. By implication this places HEIs in a weaker financial position for fulfilling their educational obligation to the South African community.

After the implementation of the SDA, the HEIs' budget for staff development to demonstrate their compliance with the SDA (refer §4.3.3.4, Figure 4.23) is a sign that the nature of staff development is steadily moving towards the core logic of Human Capital Theory – that investment in ETD would lead to the economic prosperity of the individual, organisation and country at large (Livingstone, 1997:9; Lin, 1999:29). By implication, staff development is positioned as a capitalist scheme for the economic benefit of HEIs, rather than as a function to enable the acquisition of intangible skills which accrue with interaction (referred to as Social Capital – Chapter 2, §2.5.2). In HEIs the intangible skills are predominantly attained by means of their informal development methodology (Knight *et al.*, 2006:320; Kapp and Frick, 2006:4; Burt, 2005:11 and 93; Steyn, 2004:217; Svendsen *et al.*, 2004:11; Cowan *et al.*, 2004:448).

The stance of the SDA that attention (prioritisation) should be given to the development of designated employees (refer §4.3.1.3, Figure 4.9), brings into dispute the fact that HEIs wish to promote equality in their employee ETD practices. The SDFs perceived an inequality regarding certain employees' access to development opportunities. ETD opportunities for support staff are, for example, more restricted than those for academic staff (§4.3.2.2, Figure 4.12), in terms of funding and attendance of congresses and conferences (P 4: RD4:2, 4-13). The participating SDFs also claim that preference will be given to academic staff who are upgrading their qualifications in their fields of study (P16: YD1:19, 148-150) and pursuing their career paths. In this regard, it seems fair to ask the question how HEIs can claim that staff development is available to all staff (§4.3.2.3, Figure 4.13) if SDFs perceive this inequality between academic and support staff regarding access to development opportunities?

Although HEIs support redress, HEIs do not exclude the development of non-designated employees (refer §4.3.4.1, Figure 4.28). The stance of the SDA, however,  
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namely that the development of designated employees (refer §4.3.1.3, Figure 4.9) should be prioritised, could lead to negative social relations in HEIs. Strict measures by the ETDP SETA to promote redress should be implemented discreetly as this would, by implication, compel HEIs to make rules to accelerate redress and this could lead (as has been echoed by the SDFs participating in this study, refer §4.3.4.6. Figure 4.34) to negative social relations in HEIs. The implementation of rules in this regard would also lead to increasingly positioning staff development in the epistemological ambit of Human Capital Theory, namely that humans should be managed mechanistically toward achieving the aims of someone else (government in this case), thus depriving employees as humans of their free will.

The academics' need to upgrade their qualifications is funded generally from a benefit perspective (study at the particular HEI may be free of charge or subject to the payment of a nominal fee). For support staff, financial support for obtaining formal qualifications is apparently restricted to the benefit of studying at the particular HEI, and only in exceptional cases is funding granted to pursue studies elsewhere. By contrast, academics' attainment of formal qualifications is considered a work-related skill. It is generally accepted that it is the employer's responsibility to fund work-related skills development, whereas the individual is responsible for paying for the attainment of formal education qualification(s) (Johanson *et al.*, 2004:27; Flanagan *et al.*, 1998:10; Hlavna, 1992:3). Because HEIs consider the attainment of formal education qualifications as a work-related skill (academia), it calls into question the prevailing rationale that the cost of formal education should be borne by the individual. Perhaps specific to HEIs, it is not the individual but the HEI that should support academic staff to attain formal qualifications. Similarly, the SDA's notion that credentialled skills should be promoted in South Africa, including formal education, brings into dispute the prevailing rationale of who should pay for the cost of formal education. It seems, however, that the notion that the individual should bear the cost of formal higher education should not apply to academic employees, since their qualifications are perceived as the skill of generating knowledge – a core function of HEIs.

In this section I have given my nuanced findings pertaining to the fourth and last broad question of this study: to develop an emancipatory critique of staff development in HEIs against the backdrop of the SDA. In the next section I provide some details of the implications for research, policy and practice.

#### 5.4 The implications for research, policy and practice

The findings of the data analysis in Section 4.3.2.4 seem to suggest that HEIs do not readily measure the return on investment in and of their employee ETD practices (refer §4.3.4.4, Figure 4.31). Instead, they tend to value the process of learning as the key to learning (refer §4.3.5.3, Figure 4.37). By contrast, the SDA promotes the notion that HEIs should invest in ETD as a means of achieving economic gain (refer §5.3.2). Research should, therefore, be undertaken to determine whether the SDA does achieve its assumed goal. At present, the available research indicates that a vast number of variables would have to be considered to determine whether investment in ETD would lead to economic prosperity. Since the 1970s average incomes have stagnated, employment rates have declined and graduate under-employment, under-utilisation and even unemployment have increased despite the fact that school enrolment rates continued to rise. As a result, it is not clear whether educated people are necessarily more productive or wealthier than uneducated people (Carnoy *et al.*, 2005:4; Livingstone, 2002:1; Baptise, 2001:195; Quiggin, 2000:130; Livingstone, 1997:9) (P1:818, 1643-1646).

In section 5.3.4, I contended (based on the SDFs perceptions) that more funds for skills development have been available for ETD practices in HEIs since the implementation of the SDA. From a macro financial (institutional) perspective, less funds are, however, available for ETD purposes because the payment of a payroll levy significantly decreases the available operational budget. There are rumours circulating at present (2008) (refer §4.3.3.7) that HEIs should not be obliged to pay this levy. In the context of funding for Skills Development in HEIs, the following issues, in particular, require further scientific investigation:

- It should be determined whether HEIs should pay any levy at all. HEIs are considered (semi-) governmental institutions (state-subsidised), similar to the Department of Education, which is exempted from paying a levy, so why should HEIs pay a levy? Since HEIs are state-subsidised for up to 50% of their operational costs, I contend that they should be accountable for at least the payment of a 1% levy on the 50% of their operational costs earned by HEIs as a third stream of income.





- It should be determined whether the submission of a WSP and ATR to the SETA is worthwhile (especially as regards the mandatory levy grant). HEIs earn a rebate on the levy grant following the submission of the WSP and ATR. The latter not only have to be compiled according to prescribed criteria, but also have to be signed off by a nominated labour representative on the institutional skills development committee. The SDFs' perception is that union members use the signing or not signing of the WSP and ATR as a bargaining tool. The question to be researched is what the reasons for and consequences of this are for HEIs.

One of the core reasons why SDFs find it difficult to integrate the SDA in their respective HEIs' staff development context is the provision of internally developed short courses which are currently quality assured by the Committee on Higher Education (CHE). The SDA promotes the provision of unit-standard-based (credentialled) programmes that are aligned to the NQF, and provided by SETA-registered providers. The unit-standard-based programmes aligned to the NQF fall under the auspices of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), whereas the latest norms and standards for educator training are determined by the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF), overseen by the Department of Education (DoE). By contrast, government's strategy of skills upgrading and redress (via the SDA) falls under the auspices of the Department of Labour (DoL). A research project investigating the possible improvement of the alignment between the above-mentioned bodies and minimising bureaucracy should be undertaken, otherwise the problems that the SDFs encounter (stated above) with the implementation of the SDA will not be resolved for a long time yet. A research project of this kind would be difficult, however, since it would entail obtaining support from research participants spread across SAQA, the DoE, the DoL and the HE sector.

I propose that a step towards the alignment of HEIs' employee ETD practices and the requirements of the SDA (monitored by the ETDP SETA), could be to establish a community of practice among SDFs at HEIs. Such a community of practice should include members of the ETDP SETA, since achieving the goals of one party<sup>92</sup> may have negative consequences for the other party (Field, 2004:71). This implies that

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<sup>92</sup> Unionisation can be seen as an organised mechanism to protect the interests of the members of a certain group of people (Field, 2004:6). Field furthermore argues that unionisation does, to a certain extent, protect against a decline in Social Capital.

the consequences of investment in interaction (a core principle of Social Capital Theory), in order to protect the interests of a certain stakeholder grouping (for example the HEIs), may be detrimental to or in conflict with the aims of another party (for example the ETDP SETA) which still believes that it should be responsible for monitoring the transformation of staff development in HEIs' as workplaces (refer Chapter 2, §2.2.2.1). Public debate could lead to the ETDP SETA acknowledging the relevance of certain learning interventions that may specifically apply to HEIs. The decision to abandon or amend the SDA, based on the mismatch that HEIs' SDFs experience between the intention of the SDA and that of staff development in HEIs, could, however, only be made at government level, not at a collaborative SETA and HEI level. Nevertheless, although the consequences of investment in interaction could be viewed as the collaborative protection of certain interests (which might be in conflict with the interests of another party) (Field, 2004:6), the value of such interaction to the individuals of a certain stakeholder grouping is indisputable (Crossley, 2005:284; Grootaert and Van Basteleur, 2002:9; Coleman, 1994:312).

In conclusion, there is a dearth of literature on staff development in the specific context of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. The majority of outputs, although usually based on research undertaken, report on HEIs' staff development practices on a programme/intervention level and not necessarily on staff development itself, especially in the context of the influence of an Act (such as the SDA) as seen from the perspective of the Higher Education sector. I believe that research should be undertaken on the nature of staff development in HEIs especially in the context of the influence of an Act (such as the SDA) as viewed from the perspective of the Higher Education sector.

In this section I have made suggestions on what should be researched and I also proposed a possible way forward. In the next section I provide my contemplated appraisal of the SDA in relation to HEIs.

## **5.5 A contemplated appraisal of the SDA in relation to HEIs**

Against the background of the rationale for the implementation of the SDA (refer §5.3.2) and against the backdrop of the overall findings of (a) my review of the body of scholarship, as well as (b) the empirical part of my research, I am obliged to



conclude that the SDA is largely inappropriate for HEIs in South Africa at the present juncture. I base my conclusion on the following:

- First and foremost, it is clear that Human Capital Theory is the underlying rationale for the SDA, driven initially by organised labour and then by the government, compelling HEIs to invest in credentialled skills development based on the assumption that the investment will lead to the prosperity of the investor and the country at large: the core logic of Human Capital Theory. Government with the implementation of various structures (i.e. skills committee) and templates (i.e. WSP and ATR) seems to compel HEIs to consider their employees as mere cogs in a production line.
- The semantic value of the term “skills” as perceived in the SDA, refers mainly to manual, tangible, taught skills. Even the name of the Skills Development Act privileges the above-mentioned notion of “skills”, *per se*. By contrast, Social Capital Theory underlies and proverbially provides the epistemological drive behind HEIs' staff development practices. HEIs' core function of education, as expounded by its academics (the majority employee category), does in fact apply informal development as a means of generating knowledge but to break standards, not to be subordinated to standards. The SDA could, therefore, at most be applicable to the support staff members who are inclined to work toward reaching certain standards of performance and to academic staff members who need to acquire certain practical skills (i.e. in administration or Information Technology). The SDA does not apply to the cognitive thought and knowledge-generating purposes of proper academic endeavour (Blackmore *et al.*, 2006: 384; Blackwell *et al.*, 2003:5). Generating cognitive thought and knowledge is the outcome of interaction, networking, relationships of trust, and is consequently embedded in the core logic of Social Capital Theory.
- The participating SDFs use the term “all” – referring to designated and non-designated employees – as the common denominator in all seven of the HEIs in the research study. If HEIs follow the government's prescriptions regarding the development of designated employees, they might have to discriminate against non-designated employees. This means that HEIs would have to exclude non-designated employees from contributing to the effectiveness and efficiency of HEIs. Due to the nature of their core business, HEIs will struggle

with the implementation of the SDA because there are top achievers from all cultures and races in HEIs. Favouring the skills development of one top achiever over that of another could make the SDA irrelevant to HEIs and would simply restrict academic freedom even further.

- SDFs do not necessarily have a mandate to change the deeply entrenched context of staff development in HEIs. As the implementation of governing structures in HEI does not encourage dialogue about the SDA, the SDA is merely tolerated. As a participant-observer, I have to record my observation that I do not see (at the present juncture) any urgency among HEIs to oppose the implementation of the SDA. This calls into question whether HEIs are merely following the path of least resistance, or whether they are simply tired of confrontation?

I will now conclude this report with a critical reflection on the whole research project.

## **5.6 A critical reflection on the research project: co-operation, limitations and contributions**

An attempt was made throughout this study to describe my critical consciousness by questioning myself not only on “how my own (and the participants’) life experience(s) influence research”, but also on “how research feeds back into my own (and the participants’) life experience(s)” (Wilkinson, 1988: 494). My self-reflection on the co-operation of SDFs, limitations and contributions of this study, as encouraged by critical interpretivism as my chosen epistemological paradigm (refer Chapter 3, §Section 3.2.1), is discussed to some extent in this section, with more concrete interpretations offered in §5.7 below.

### **5.6.1 The lack of co-operation from some respondents**

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of participation and co-operation by one of the seven participating SDFs. Although a concerted effort was made to contact the SDF, even by the SDF's senior colleague, this was to no avail. Another limitation of the study is that in certain themes (noted), I did not manage to delve deeply enough (from a meta-theoretical point of view) to gain an understanding of what may be underpinning a particular problem or challenge which the participating

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SDFs have encountered with the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. As previously explained, I specifically did not intend to confront the SDFs openly with my own perceived (pre-determined) views on the implementation of the SDA. I tried, instead, through open debates about the context of staff development and the context of the implementation of the SDA, to critique what the SDFs have said, thus gaining an understanding of the effects of the implementation of the SDA.

## **5.7 Limitations of the research**

The problem of the non-participation and lack of co-operation by one of the SDFs affected the validation of the SDFs' responses, even though this study was never intended to be positivistic in any way. Another limitation of this research is that the participant group consisted of all the universities in Gauteng, thereby excluding universities in the other provinces of SA. Unfortunately, as explained above, the constraints of costs and the time needed to gather information from all the universities made a larger sample simply impractical. Lastly, no inputs was obtained from those employees in HEIs that provide staff development programmes within HEIs, only SDFs (refer §3.4.2).

## **5.8 Contributions of this study**

This chapter concludes with a note on the contribution of this study to the understanding of the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. This study makes two major contributions (refer §5.8.1 and §5.8.2) to the debate on the conceptualisation of staff development in HEIs in the context of the implementation of the SDA, specifically as regards the challenges that HEIs encounter, and consequently the effects that these challenges have on staff development in HEIs. Lastly, this is a critical interpretive research study on skills development in HEIs *per se*.

### **5.8.1 Contribution towards an understanding of staff development in HEIs in the context of the implementation of the SDA**

I have endeavoured to steer the debate towards not only the aim, reasons and theoretical basis of staff development in HEIs but also towards the effects of the implementation of the SDA. This indicates that staff development in HEIs and the



implementation of the SDA should not be taken for granted, since there is more to both than meets the eye. As pointed out in earlier chapters, staff development in HEIs has to adapt to the implementation of the SDA and the effects it has on HEIs. This study brings to the fore the underlying reasons why HEIs encounter problems with the integration of the SDA in the staff development ambit of HEIs (refer §5.3.3). In addition, the study also indicates a path which could be followed to bring about a better understanding of HEIs' employee ETD needs in the context of the requirements of the SDA (refer §5.4). Some warnings should, however, be heeded. There is a danger, as Muller (2000:114) points out, that critical theory researchers may expect the world to change because of the strengths of their "critical insights" but people are not always open to change. SDFs in HEIs could, therefore, reject the critical insights of this study as they may not want to confront the challenges associated with the implementation of the SDA. HEIs should, nevertheless, take cognisance of their SDFs' perceptions of the underlying aim, reasons and theoretical basis of staff development in HEIs and the aims of the implementation of the SDA.

### **5.8.2 Contribution based on the critical interpretative approach followed**

As explained in Chapter 2, this is the first study undertaken in South Africa to determine the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs, and it moreover takes a critical interpretive approach (refer §5.3.3 and §5.3.4). This is based on the epistemological and pragmatic considerations of the aim of the study, not on an *a priori* decision to reject certain methodologies because of their epistemological grounds. I have, therefore, followed a critical interpretive approach, critically interpreting the implementation of the SDA in a wider socio-political and economic context with the research participants (refer §3.3).

### **5.9 Conclusion**

The aim of this last chapter was to integrate the information contained in the previous chapters with the findings of the research. This was accomplished by comparing the empirical data with the non-empirical data (review of the body of scholarship) regarding the reasons, aims and theoretical explanations of the implementation of the SDA and those of staff development in HEIs. Aspects of the match and mismatch between the reasons, aims and theoretical explanations of the implementation of the SDA and staff development in HEIs were explored. Critical theory allowed the

researcher to search for the underlying reasons for the problems that HEIs encounter with the implementation of the SDA. On the surface, the nature and aims of the SDA and staff development seem similar, but detailed examination shows that there is a mismatch between them. Critical theory allowed the researcher to search for this mismatch, which is shown to be based on a fundamental difference between the aims, reasons and theoretical foundation of the SDA and those of staff development in HEIs. This is exacerbated by the limited interaction between the ETDP SETA and HEIs. It is proposed that the way forward should be, as Habermas would have suggested: one where role-players should share their perceptions and be open to the challenges that they face, including that of informal development. It is, therefore, proposed that a community of practice should be established where SDFs and members of the ETDP SETA could deliberate on skills development issues. If such a community of practice is not established, HEIs could become “armies” of resistance that would defeat policy reforms or remould them to suit their own interests or circumstances. Politicians, policy makers, training providers, workers and employers are all inextricably interlinked by virtue of the SDA, and yet each operates with different and sometimes conflicting goals and ideologies. They furthermore fail to achieve their goals because of entrenched political interests.

The study has, however, certain limitations, specifically regarding the lack of participation of some of the SDFs and also regarding my inability to delve deeper into certain questions posed, in order to bring the underlying theoretical explanations to the fore. I did, however, manage to reflect on other issues, such as the perceptions of the SDFs regarding the effects of the implementation of the SDA in HEIs. In addition, I suggested certain themes which should be further researched (§5.4).