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# LABOUR RELATIONS TRAINING PROFILES FOR SUPERVISORS IN A LARGE GOLD-MINING COMPANY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of the gold-mining industry for South Africa's sustained economic growth cannot be over-emphasised. The gold-mining industry employs more than 460 000 people, and there are some 40 gold mines within the borders of the Republic of South Africa.

Underground working conditions in these gold mines are particularly hazardous, owing to the depth (+- 3 000 metres) at which gold is mined. Underground workers are also exposed to extreme heat, dampness, noise, confined working areas, long working hours, and, of course, there is the added hazard of darkness itself. Safety procedures are therefore of the utmost importance in this environment. Needless to say, the factors listed above contribute to a high level of work stress. This, coupled with South Africa's volatile political situation, makes the threat of labour conflict a very real one.

Labour relations and the management thereof are therefore considered to be of the utmost importance in the gold-mining industry and whenever this subject is under scrutiny, the following question arises: "Do supervisors possess the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to

ensure that labour relations are managed successfully?" In other words, "do supervisors have the right labour relations profile?" and "does management know which areas of labour relations need to be focused on to ensure that supervisors receive the training they need?"

This article is a follow-up of an article previously published in this journal (see Erasmus 1993: 31-46). In the previous article the focus was on how job incumbents and their supervisors in the particular company viewed the importance and the training needs of job incumbents regarding different industrial relations issues, as identified by a factor analysis. A list of priorities with regard to the importance of the identified labour relation issues was provided together with a list of priorities concerning the training needs of the job incumbents. Added to this the results of the views of job incumbents and their supervisors with regard to biographical variables such as position, workplace, work classification, educational qualifications and age were discussed. The previous article therefore considered generic issues but did not focus as much on the very important aspect of identifying **specific training profiles** (with regard to labour relations) for different supervisory levels.

The purpose of this article is to identify training profiles for different supervisory levels by using data of the same study as indicated in the abovementioned article, namely supervisors employed in one of South Africa's major gold-mining companies. Their specific views on the importance of the identified labour relation issues and specific training needs for them are identified. Ideally the article by Erasmus (1993: 31-46) and this article should be read together since the one complements the other.

## 2 METHOD

To obtain the answers required, we decided to use a structured questionnaire, and the research methodology was executed in the following phases.

### • Phase I: Literature study

A literature study was undertaken, which included a study of related labour relations and training theory. Job descriptions of the target population groups were also scrutinised to ensure that the relevant labour relations responsibilities were identified. This was integrated with the theory related to the subject area to ensure a fully representative "body of knowledge" for the purpose of developing task statements, which follows in phase II.

### • Phase II: Task statement generation

This phase consisted of the generation of labour relations task statements (based on the literature study) in accordance with the task list method (Gael 1982; 1988). The aim was to identify as many labour rela-

tions tasks as possible to represent the full spectrum of labour relations responsibilities of a job incumbent at the gold mine under investigation.

### • Phase III: Subject specialist committee

The labour relations statements were reviewed by a subject specialist committee (composed of specialists in the labour relations field from the gold-mining company), and a final list of 174 labour relations task statements relevant and unique to the gold-mining company was drawn up for the pretest phase.

### • Phase IV: Pretest

A trial "Labour Relations Training Profile Questionnaire" was developed and administered to 40 selected supervisors. These supervisors represented supervisory levels to be used in the study and included supervisors from the following major functional groupings: mining, surveying, engineering, security, human resources, finance, planning and training.

The instructions in the questionnaire required respondents to fill in biographical details and to evaluate the labour relations task statements in terms of the following:

- importance to successful execution of his or her job and
- existence of a training need for that particular statement

If the task statement was not applicable, space was provided for the respondent to indicate this. The importance level scale was graded as follows:

- 1 = unimportant
- 2 = not so important
- 3 = important
- 4 = very important
- 5 = very much important
- 6 = extremely important

The training needs scale was graded as follows:

- 1 = no training – competence high
- 2 = refresher training – competence declining
- 3 = further training – competence low
- 4 = appropriate training – competence nonexistent

Respondents were also asked to complete an "Industrial Relations Profile Questionnaire Commentary Page" to determine clarity on the language used, length of the questionnaire and relevance of the task statements. Respondents were also given examples on how to respond to the task statements. The "Industrial Relations Profile Questionnaire Commentary Page" results were analysed and a correlation analysis was carried out between the importance and training needs scales. Statements which correlated lower than 0,5 were examined and eight statements were altered. No further statements were added and minor changes to statements were made before the questionnaire was finalised.

- **Phase V: Final "Labour Relations Training Profile Questionnaire"**

The final "Labour Relations Training Profile Questionnaire" consisted of 174 task statements. Seven main labour relations functions were identified, each of which had separate subfunctions. The main functions were as follows:

- 1 General orientation towards labour relations (9 task statements)
- 2 Economic systems (11 task statements)
- 3 Labour legislation (38 task statements)
- 4 Organisation and structure of labour relations in South Africa (35 task statements)
- 5 Underlying principles in labour relations (9 task statements)
- 6 Labour relations procedures and processes at enterprise level (23 task statements)
- 7 Supervisory skills required (49 task statements)

- **Phase VI: Population identification and final "Labour Relations Training Profile Questionnaire implementation"**

The identified population for this investigation were the supervisory levels according to the Paterson grading system, namely C1 (lower management) to D4 (middle management). This group, which totalled 1 052 people, included supervisors from all the functional groupings on the mine. A total of 550 supervisors completed the final "Labour Relations Training Profile Questionnaire", which represents 52,2 per cent of the identified population.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

A summary of biographical details is presented in table 1 and reflects an acceptable sample of the population group.

**Table 1****Biographical data**

POSITIONS	C-Band	79%
	D-Band	21%
		<hr/> 100%
WORKPLACES	Mines	76,8%
	Surface installations	23,2%
		<hr/> 100%
WORK CLASSIFICATIONS	Mining	29,3%
	Engineering	19,6%
	Human resources	15,6%
	Finance and Administration	4,4%
	Other mining related classifications	31,1%
		<hr/> 100%
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	Standard 9 and lower	22,4%
	Standard 10	33,1%
	Diploma	30,3%
	B.Degree or higher	14,2%
		<hr/> 100%
HOME LANGUAGE	Afrikaans	69,8%
	English	25,6%
	Black language	4,6%
		<hr/> 100%
SEX	Male	95,3%
	Female	4,7%
		<hr/> 100%
AGE	Under 40 years	81,9%
	Over 40 years	18,1%
		<hr/> 100%
SERVICE PERIOD IN PRESENT POST	Up to 6 years	68%
	More than 6 years	32%
		<hr/> 100%

### 3.2 FACTOR ANALYSIS

The responses of 550 incumbents on the importance scale were factor analysed by the principal component method (Kim & Meuller 1978: 21). Each factor solution was tested by rotating the factor structure to

the varimax criterion (Mulaik 1972: 258). A 14 factor solution was selected as a result of this rotated factor structure and the interpretation of the factors. These 14 factors (see table 2) represent the most complete, easily interpreted and yet brief solution.

**Table 2**

#### **Results of the factor analysis**

FACTOR DIMENSIONS	BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DIMENSION
1	General management skills and interpersonal relations
2	South African system of labour relations and labour legislation
3	Rights and duties of employers and employees
4	Management and union agreements
5	Factors influencing remuneration
6	Grievance and disciplinary procedures
7	Negotiations
8	Trade unions
9	Shop steward
10	Cultural differences
11	Meeting procedures
12	Macro factors influencing labour relations
13	Personnel retrenchments
14	Economic systems

### 3.3 RELIABILITY

It was decided to use the Cronbach's Alpha split half method to determine the questionnaire's reliability. This method allows the researcher to determine the reliability without administering the questionnaire twice (Lemke & Wiersma 1976: 98-102).

The subprogram "reliability" of the SAS program was used (SAS User's Guide 1985) and an overall reliability of 94 percent was obtained.

### 3.4 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

A statistical analysis (ANOVA) was undertaken to determine the rela-

tionship between the biographical variables and the various labour relations dimensions or factors. Statistical analysis to determine the differences between biographical variables and the different labour relations dimensions was also executed but is not discussed in this article.

To determine training profiles for the different supervisory levels, it was essential to focus in more detail on the different supervisory positions. An analysis of how each level viewed the importance of the different labour relations dimensions and their training needs was done and is discussed below.

### **3.5 TRAINING PROFILES FOR THE DIFFERENT SUPERVISORY LEVELS**

In this section the training profiles of the various supervisory levels are determined in terms of the various Paterson grading bands.

#### **3.5.1 C1 supervisory level**

In this study, the C1 supervisory level (lower management) mainly represents those from the human resources, finance and administration, engineering and mining functional groupings. Respondents at this level indicated that they considered two dimensions, that is general management skills and interpersonal relationships and personnel retrenchment, to be the most important dimensions in the execution of their work. Respondents at this level considered knowledge of the South African system of industrial relations to be the lowest on their priority list.

Finally, C1 respondents indicated that the need for training in the management of personnel retrenchment was the most acute. The least important training need, according to this group of respondents, related to the management of factors influencing remuneration. For this profile see table 3.

**Table 3**

**Training profile for the supervisory level C**

Labour relations dimensions	$\bar{X}$ O		$\bar{X}$ O	
1. General management skills and interpersonal relations	4,08	12	2,20	11
2. South African system of labour relations and labour legislation	3,29	12	2,30	7
3. Rights and duties of employers and employees	3,61	6	2,34	4
4. Management and union agreements	3,62	5	2,23	10
5. Factors influencing remuneration	3,54	7	2,17	12
6. Grievance & disciplinary procedures	3,93	3	2,37	2
7. Negotiations	3,53	8	2,24	9
8. Trade unions	3,31	11	2,36	3
9. Shop steward	3,52	9	2,32	5
10. Cultural differences	4,07	2	2,28	8
11. Meeting procedures	3,81	4	2,15	13
12. Macro factors influencing labour relations	3,37	10	2,31	6
13. Personnel retrenchments	4,08	1	2,63	1
14. Economic systems	2,82	13	2,03	14

O = Priority order

1 2 3 4 5 6

1 2 3 4

— Job incumbents

Level of importance

Training needs level



### **3.5.2 C5 supervisory level**

In this study, the C5 supervisory levels mainly represent human resource officers, engineering foremen, mining shift bosses, security officers and others employed at the same supervisory level.

This supervisory group, as in the case of the C1 supervisory group, also considered the same two dimensions as having the highest priority, that is general management skills and interpersonal relationships and personnel retrenchment (dimension 13). Grievance and disciplinary procedures are also considered to be high on the priority list of C5 supervisors. The dimension with the lowest priority (although still considered important) was trade unions.

Like C1 supervisors, those at C5 supervisory level indicated that training in the management of personnel retrenchment was the most acute of all training needs. This group considered that the least important training need was that relating to meeting procedures (see table 4).

### **3.5.3 D1/2 supervisory levels**

In this study, the D1/2 supervisory levels primarily represent senior human resource officers, security superintendents, mine overseers and engineering supervisors.

The dimensions considered to be the highest priority by these groups were indicated as being grievance and disciplinary procedures, general management skills and interpersonal relationships, cultural differences,

personnel retrenchments and macro factors influencing labour relations. The dimensions given the lowest priority by D1 and D2 supervisory levels were economic systems, the South African system of industrial relations and trade unions.

Again, this supervisory group indicated that the need for training in the management of personnel retrenchment was the most acute of all training needs. They also felt the same about grievance and disciplinary procedures, management and union agreements, and the whole issue of the rights and duties of employers and employees. The least important training need was considered to be that relating to meeting procedures and the different economic systems for South Africa (see table 5).

### **3.5.4 D4 supervisory level**

In this study, the D4 supervisory level represents mainly human resource managers and mining and engineering managers.

Grievance and disciplinary procedures, general management skills and interpersonal relationships, cultural differences and personnel retrenchment were dimensions considered to be of the highest priority by this group.

Their needs for training were, however, indicated as being the greatest in the areas of general management skills and interpersonal relationships, trade unions and cultural differences. This group felt that the least important training need relates to that dimension dealing with factors influencing remuneration (see table 6).

**Table 4**

**Training profile for the supervisory level C5**

Labour relations dimensions	Level of importance						Training needs level			
					$\bar{X}$	O			$\bar{X}$	O
1. General management skills and interpersonal relations					4,09	1			2,34	6
2. South African system of labour relations and labour legislation					3,49	10			2,40	4
3. Rights and duties of employers and employees					3,73	5			2,41	3
4. Management and union agreements					3,57	8			2,31	8
5. Factors influencing remuneration					3,76	4			2,51	2
6. Grievance & disciplinary procedures					3,98	2			2,34	6
7. Negotiations					3,59	7			2,28	10
8. Trade unions					3,37	12			2,28	10
9. Shop steward					3,45	11			2,32	7
10. Cultural differences					3,97	3			2,30	9
11. Meeting procedures					3,69	6			2,26	11
12. Macro factors influencing labour relations					3,56	9			2,37	5
13. Personnel retrenchments					4,09	1			2,53	1
14. Economic systems					3,10	13			2,30	9

0 = Priority order

1 2 3 4 5 6

1 2 3 4

— Job incumbents

Level of importance

Training needs level

Table 5

## Training profile for the supervisory level D1/2

Labour relations dimensions	—		—	
	X	O	X	O
1. General management skills and interpersonal relations	3,74	2	2,65	5
2. South African system of labour relations and labour legislation	2,89	12	2,23	6
3. Rights and duties of employers and employees	3,18	8	2,33	3
4. Management and union agreements	3,25	6	2,19	8
5. Factors influencing remuneration	2,37	1	2,37	2
6. Grievance & disciplinary procedures	2,99	10	2,04	11
7. Negotiations	2,94	11	2,30	4
8. Trade unions	2,99	10	2,08	10
9. Shop steward	3,66	3	2,15	9
10. Cultural differences	3,20	7	1,94	13
11. Meeting procedures	3,81	4	2,15	13
12. Macro factors influencing labour relations	3,30	5	2,21	7
13. Personnel retrenchments	3,50	4	2,50	1
14. Economic systems	2,57	13	2,02	12

0 = Priority order

1 2 3 4 5 6

1 2 3 4

— Job incumbents

Level of importance

Training needs level

**Table 6**

**Training profile for the supervisory level C**

Labour relations dimensions	Level of importance						Training needs level			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4
1. General management skills and interpersonal relations										
2. South African system of labour relations and labour legislation										
3. Rights and duties of employers and employees										
4. Management and union agreements										
5. Factors influencing remuneration										
6. Grievance & disciplinary procedures										
7. Negotiations										
8. Trade unions										
9. Shop steward										
10. Cultural differences										
11. Meeting procedures										
12. Macro factors influencing labour relations										
13. Personnel retrenchments										
14. Economic systems										

0 = Priority order

— Job incumbents

1 2 3 4 5 6

Level of importance

1 2 3 4

Training needs level

#### 4 DISCUSSION

Although the four supervisory levels view the priority order of the identified labour relations dimensions somewhat differently, a similarity of viewpoints does exist between the four supervisory levels. From Table 7 it is clear that the four dimensions given the highest importance priority are general management skills

and interpersonal relationships, personnel retrenchment, grievance and disciplinary procedures and cultural differences. Various authors (Bittel 1985, Von Der Embse 1987 and Van Dyk et al 1992) agree that general management principles and interpersonal relationships are of crucial importance to supervisors and the findings of our study support this viewpoint.

**Table 7**  
**Summary of the four dimensions with the highest importance priority**

DIMENSIONS	SUPERVISORY LEVELS			
	C1	C5	D1/2	D4
General management skills and interpersonal relationships	1	2		
Personnel retrenchment	1	4		
Grievance and disciplinary procedures	3	2	1	
Cultural differences	2	3		
Meeting procedures	4	-	-	-
Factors influencing compensation	-	4	-	-
KEY:	1 = PRIORITY 1	3 = PRIORITY 3		
	2 = PRIORITY 2	4 = PRIORITY 4		

Personnel retrenchment and grievance and disciplinary procedures are considered to be a high priority as far as lower and higher supervisory levels are respectively concerned. Personnel retrenchment is also the dimension given the highest priority

in terms of training required (see table 8).

Personnel retrenchments are currently very much part of the South African business scene, owing to the low level of economic activity, which

has negatively affected a number of companies since 1989. This is particularly true of the gold-mining industry, which has been forced to lay off staff on account of a low and falling gold price. A sustained gold price below \$330 per fine ounce has major implications for marginal gold mines. It may lead to the closure of a large number of marginal gold mines within a few years in South Africa if the Government does not intervene with substantial subsidising of these mines to prevent their

closure. If not, the retrenchment of tens of thousands of workers would result, with little chance of alternative employment in the present recessionary times in southern Africa.

The supervisors in this particular study received no training before personnel retrenchments became a reality and it can be deduced that an activity which affects supervisors directly requires the necessary training input before it is implemented.

**Table 8**

**Summary of the dimensions where the need for training is the greatest**

DIMENSIONS	SUPERVISORY LEVELS			
	C1	C5	D1/2	D4
Personnel retrenchment	1			-
Trade unions	3	-	-	2
Cultural differences	-	-	-	3
Grievance and disciplinary procedures	2	-	2	4
General management skills and interpersonal relationships	-	-	-	1
Rights and duties of employers and employees	4	3	4	-
Factors influencing remuneration	-	2	-	-
SA system of industrial relations	-	4	-	-
Management and union agreements	-	-	3	-
KEY:	1 = PRIORITY 1	3 = PRIORITY 3		
	2 = PRIORITY 2	4 = PRIORITY 4		

The fact that the grievance and disciplinary procedures are considered high on the training priority list of supervisors indicates that this is an area in which training cannot stop and confirms that this area is a very important and fundamental element in industrial relations. Proper training not only empowers supervisors with the right knowledge, skills and attitudes but, when applied, also contributes to the better management of conflict and enhances the whole of the labour-management relationship. "Back to basics" seems to be the appropriate approach. The variety of ethnic groupings of the various people employed on South Africa's gold mines and the consequences in the workforce itself make this a very important management issue. It seems, however, that the need for training in this particular dimension is not as great as for the lower supervisory levels in the investigation.

Owing to the level of personnel retrenchment currently taking place and which is, in fact, on the increase, the occurrence of certain labour practices in the mining industry (eg illegal union activities such as stay-aways and strikes) may be owing to a lack of supervisor training in disciplinary and grievance procedures, and this, in turn, may be the reason for the indicated training need in the dimension "rights and duties of employers and employees". Supervisors not only have to know what their own rights and obligations are; they also have to manage subordinates, which means they need to know what constitutes employers' and employees' rights and duties.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The need to determine training needs and to determine training profiles for supervisors based on specific needs is essential. The determining of basic industrial relations training areas is not, in fact, an art form accessible only to the few: any book on the subject can provide the necessary guidance. However, prioritising these issues according to specific needs will contribute not only to labour stability but also to the organisational success of South Africa's gold-mining industry, something which is essential given the serious constraints presently facing the industry.

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