Introduction

In 2018, South Africa marked 20 years since the promulgation of the workplace transformation legislation namely the Employment Equity and Skills Development Acts (1998) respectively. These Acts were designed to progressively address workplace inequalities and to eliminate unfair discrimination through a policy of affirmative action (the Employment Equity Act) and providing a framework for human resource development (the Skills Development Act). The result would be a pool of suitably qualified candidates from the designated groups that would be eligible for possible promotion and career advancement, providing for greater worker mobility.

However, the impact of the workplace transformation legislation to redress the inequality in the workplace appears to have been minimal. Employers in general complain of a lack of a skilled labour pool from the designated groups (women, black people, the disabled) to fill top positions in organisations as well as the slow pace by which low skilled workers are advancing in their careers. In South Africa, more than half of municipal managers and chief financial officers do not have the minimum competencies to do their jobs.

The two pieces of legislation that are supposed to be supporting each other in driving transformation are not achieving the desired outcome. One of the key reasons advanced by the Commission for Employment Equity for this persistent phenomenon is the lack of political will and commitment from managers to transform their organisations through ensuring the
The statistics indicate that the intended beneficiaries of the Act are often overlooked in HRD programs and promotions which is totally counterproductive to the very objectives of the Acts.

The dominant paradigm in municipalities is a focus on compliance, as opposed to commitment in response to workplace transformation legislation. The focus is on the quality and consistency of enforcement, as opposed to embracing collaboration and sustainability of outcomes in deciding on how to best respond to transformation and the organisational benefits of an effective HRD program. This paradigm is naturally counterproductive to transformation which poses a threat to sustainability and the stability of municipalities caused by the poor management of HRD and the lack of collaboration by the various municipal actors.

This paper analyses how human resource development is managed in Dutch municipalities and present examples, implementing practises and strategies for the South African context. A background is provided that outlines the Dutch local government system, the regulatory bodies are unpacked covers the legislative framework of the Dutch system, together with an analysis of the municipal policies and publications.

The research findings are presented using 5 broad themes;

- The HRD challenges.
- HRD policy and practice.
- Organisation of the HRD function.
- HRD and management collaboration.
- Internal democracy.

The paper concludes by arguing that South African municipalities can learn from their Dutch counterparts.

BACKGROUND

Present-day South Africa is regarded as one of the most unequal societies in the world, the inequality of income being spread mostly across racial and gender lines (Gumede 2009:12). An essential component of apartheid policy was the explicit belief that there was no reason
to educate black South Africans equally as they were not allowed to advance professionally. This resulted in a combination of the racial segmentation in the labour market and racial discrimination in education and training, producing a racially defined low skills model. High skills jobs being the preserve of whites and low skills the domain of black people in general (Ashton 2004:105).

Between April and June 2013, the researcher conducted a series of interviews with various Dutch politicians, administrators, academics and HRD specialists at four different municipalities of varying size namely, Tilburg, Dorderecht, Dongen and Den Bosch Municipalities. This was combined with analysing the political and administrative structure of municipalities in the Netherlands.

The 2015 Human Development Index (HDI) rank the Netherlands as the most developed country in Europe and the 4th most developed country in the world. Considered one of the smaller countries in Europe, the Netherlands is best described as a well-educated nation with a trusted and stable democracy (Leenes and Svenson: 2005:1).

The Dutch population is diverse and includes people from the former Dutch colonies who have settled in the Netherlands. Of the 16.5 million inhabitants, an estimated 370 000 are from Turkey, 330 000 from Morocco, 330 000 from Surinam, the Dutch Antilles and some 40 000 from the Southern Moluccas (VNG, 2008:10-12). These figures account for approximately 5% of the population (Wiersma & Van den Berg, 1998:63; Van den Berg, 2013: Interviews). The government remains the biggest employer in the Netherlands. Besides being home to the world’s largest and busiest port, namely Rotterdam, the country boasts being home to multinational companies such as Shell Oil, KLM Airlines, Philips and Unilever (Wiersma & Van den Berg, 1998:63).

THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The city of Amsterdam is the economic capital of the Netherlands, whilst the seat of government is in The Hague. Although the Netherlands has a monarch as the head of state, the monarchy wields no direct political power and ministers manage their respective
portfolios with regular accounts to parliament. The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy that is ruled by the monarchy but at the same time it has a Constitution (1848) that is organised around the central, provincial and local governments (“gemeentes”/municipalities), which cooperate to govern the state (Hendriks, Karsten, 2013: Interview; Loughlin & Lidstrom, 2011:97-119).

This organisation of the government can be traced back to the seminal work of Thorbecke in 1848. This included the drafting of the Constitution (1848), the Province Act (1850) and the Local Government Act (1851). These three Acts give effect to the decentralised unitary state. The unitary nature of the state is not based on a centralised government structure, but rather on agreement amongst the three active components of the state – i.e. central, provincial and local – as enshrined in the Constitution. In this model, local and provincial government have broad powers to deal with matters of local concern. The three levels of government, however, work together, led by the central government with the provinces and municipalities enjoying a considerable degree of autonomy.

The spheres of government all have their own responsibilities or areas of competence, which are led by the central government through policy and oversight supervision. There are 12 provinces and 467 municipalities (city, town or borough). The provinces vary in size and population, each being responsible for implementing central government decisions insofar as they fall within the competence and duties of the province. The municipalities normally have bigger budgets at their disposal as well as more staff compared to provincial and central governments. The civil service employs 13 000 provincial, 185 000 municipal and 116 000 central government officials. From these figures, it is clear that municipalities play a significant role. Central government and municipalities are thus the key political and administrative levels for government policy implementation and coordination (Hendriks et al., 2011:97-119).

The main competences of municipalities are focused on spatial development and planning, housing, sewage services, municipal roads and harbours, primary and secondary education, social care and execution of social security, culture and recreation, environment and health care. Municipalities in this instance have the freedom to take initiatives, provided that the initiatives and programmes are not in conflict with the rules and requirements as set by
national government. They are, however, constrained by central policy guidelines (Hendriks et al., 2011:97-119).

Another higher tier of government can also be defined, namely the European Union. In many instances, European law prevails; a case in point is the existence of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which aims to promote the interest of Europe in cases where European law takes precedence over national, local and or regional law. In the Netherlands, the project of “Europe-proof municipalities” has commenced, which is aimed at ensuring that the municipality’s rules and regulations are in line with European Union laws (Vereeniging van Nederlandse Gemeentes (VNG), 2008:16-24).

The Dutch political model is best described in terms of consultation, consensus and compromise often referred to as “poldering”. This approach leans towards a preference for dialogue, discussions and gatherings, as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon model of majority rule (Hendriks et al., 2011:97-119). This is observable at all levels of government, since no single majority party holds office.

**POLITICAL STRUCTURE**

Political authority within the municipality rests with the municipal council. The council is elected every four years through a multiparty system that usually leads to a coalition government. Legislative control is vested in the council, whereas executive authority rest with the executive committee (the mayor and aldermen). The council performs an oversight role to the executive, determines policy and monitors the activities of the executive committee. The council also plays an important advisory role to the Minister of Interior Affairs, on the appointment of the mayor (VNG, 2008:27).

The mayor is the *de facto* leader of government in the municipal council and is appointed by the crown (on the recommendation of the Minister of Interior Affairs). The mayor serves as the chairperson of both the council and the executive committee. The position of mayor is not necessarily linked to any political party in council; the mayor carries the responsibility of keeping the council together to ensure that municipal decision-making is correct, proper and respectable through engaging different municipal stakeholders. Above all, the mayor is
regarded as a manager and much more than just a figurehead. By way of illustration, the mayor is the head of the police and fire brigade and considered to be the ultimate ombudsman (VNG, 2008:27).

Aldermen, on the other hand, are appointed by council and follow a political programme, playing a more active policy-making political role than the mayor. Aldermen have defined responsibilities that include taking accountability for certain portfolios, reporting to the municipal council. The position of alderman is a combination of political, management and administrative functions (VNG, 2008:27).

Mayors and aldermen can be recalled by the municipal council in the event that the council loses confidence in the ability of the executive to perform their duties with care and due diligence (VNG, 2008:27).

**ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

The head of the municipal administration is the “gemeentesekretaris”, hereafter referred to as the GS. The work of the municipality is typically divided into specialist sections and is normally headed by a head of department. Officials are appointed based on their technical and administrative competence, and are expected to be above party-political affiliation and to carry out their work in a non-partisan way. They typically perform an implementation role and execute council policy. They manage the institution and the work of the executive. Municipal managers are acutely aware of the need to ensure that the public (clients) are treated with care and respect, and are expected to be professional in their approach. Some municipalities have adopted a service or quality charter that sets out the service quality standards that are to be expected from the municipality. The task of management is then to ensure that service standards are maintained and improved on continuously.

**REGULATORY STAKEHOLDERS**

There are two regulatory bodies that play important roles with the Dutch local government system. The first organisation is the Vereeniging van Nederlandse Gemeentes (VNG) that can be best described as an umbrella organisation of the 467 municipalities in the Netherlands,
founded in 1912. Having built up an extensive knowledge base, the VNG can primarily be considered a service delivery vehicle to the member organisations, offering a platform for municipalities to raise issues as a collective. The VNG represents the employer function, which means that the VNG bargains with the labour unions about the collective agreement for all the employees of the municipalities. Within the VNG a special unit represents this function, namely the College voor Arbeidszaken (CVA). The broad aim of the VNG is to strengthen the tier of government (municipalities) that is closest to the people. As the collective voice of municipalities, it interacts with other tiers of government such as the provinces as well as the national government. In this it performs an advocacy and lobbyist role. The work of the VNG can broadly be categorised into the following streams outlined below.

**Products and services**

Through its products and services, the VNG gives effect to the mandate of delivering services to the members. Some innovative examples that relate to HRD include:

- **An interactive website** that offers a variety of media options;
- **Case studies** of communities of practice – this page has more than 4 000 examples of practice and learning, so members can search the database for best practices;
- **Model regulation** - the VNG writes policies on a regular basis and posts these on the website for members to access;
- **Advice** - the VNG has a knowledge bank of suggestions on, amongst other things, HRD policy development and execution;
- **Legislation calendar** - this service allows members to track where legislation sits within the legislative chain that may interest local government.
- **VNG magazine** - the magazine appears every second week and offers insights into the HRD developments in the field of local government;
- **Discussion forums** - through knowledge networks via VNG, professional colleagues have an opportunity to share documents, seek professional advice and connect with professionals in the field;
• **Surveys** - the aim of the surveys is to ensure that the organisation stays in touch with the members and their views; in this way, the organisation remains relevant. The goal is continuous development;

• **Action programmes** - this is a platform where knowledge is shared amongst communities of practice. This is done through regional meetings, training of new councillors as well through a programme called *Quick scan*. This programme offers an overview of the state of the municipality on several levels.

The second organisation is the A+O Fonds Gemeenten, hereafter referred to as “the fund”. The fund was started in 1993 by the social partners (organised labour, municipalities and the VNG) in the Netherlands. The fund aims to advance and support innovative activities in the municipal labour market as well as HRM policy and research. The primary aim of the fund’s activities is to ensure that the local government sector functions optimally by making sure that working for a municipality is considered an attractive career option. The fund is relatively small and has a programmatic approach to its work. The work of the organisation is executed on three levels, i.e. research (knowledge gathering), sharing (knowledge sharing with community of practitioners) and application (local application of knowledge). Some of the innovative HRM/D programmes are highlighted below in Figure 1.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Het Nieuwe Werken (HNW)</td>
<td>The objective of this programme is to provide new insights into the world focusing on the changing nature of work. This is done through sharing of knowledge and supporting municipalities with implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development and Mobility</td>
<td>The objective of this programme is to support the municipalities and social partners through sharing knowledge on career development and mobility of workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal labour market</td>
<td>The objective of this programme is to profile the municipality in the labour market. This is done by supporting the municipality through effective labour market policies that includes, amongst other things, the development of a municipal competency box. The aim is to match all municipal functions to staff competencies, which in turn indicates the minimum required subject knowledge within the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy and sustainable working</td>
<td>The objective of this programme is to provide support to municipalities and social partners, to develop a healthy municipal working environment through improvement of conditions of employment, controlling “sick leave”, the reintegration of part-time medically fit individuals and the prevention of labour health concerns.</td>
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<td>Participation (Internal democracy)</td>
<td>The objective of this programme is to explore innovative ways in which employees can participate effectively through the Ondernemingsraad (OR) and to ensure that internal workplace democracy is strengthened. Amongst the activities undertaken is the development of a toolkit that offers workplace examples of how the worker councils are functioning effectively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employee monitor</td>
<td>This programme has as a goal to benchmark HRM practice within the sector, for local municipalities to align their HRM practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>The aim of the programme is to assist and strengthen cultural diversity within the sector, through the implementation of many projects aimed at development and application of a diversity policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidies</td>
<td>To ensure that municipalities function well, many cross-cutting subsidies are available to municipalities to support HRM/D implementation.</td>
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</table>

**Figure 1.2: Innovative HRM/D programmes** *(Stichting A+O Fonds Gemeenten, 2012)*

**The HR festival**

In addition to the activities above, the Fund organises a biannual HR gathering together with two other funds; this is called the HR Festival. This one-day festival brings together the social partners and HR professionals with the explicit aim of discussing the current and future state of HR in the public sector. It is also an opportunity for HR professionals and managers to network and to share knowledge and best practices. The VNG and the Fund both play an active and supportive role in the implementation of HRD to municipalities.

The Dutch HRD support system is built around the common values of cooperation, knowledge gathering and sharing. In this, the A+ Fonds (the Fund) is a key knowledge partner.
plans and strategies that are not backed up with research are futile. The Fund acts as an effective outside agent that assist municipalities by remaining on the cutting edge of policy and practice through ongoing action research and then communicating that research back to municipalities. In this way, best practice is based on evidence and ideas as opposed to ideology and emotion. Decision making is therefore based on professional prudent empirical research that in turn is shared and the learning built back into the municipal management system.

The 3-year programme cycle of the Fund ensures that stakeholders and beneficiaries are aware of what works and what does not work. The programmatic approach is relevant and politically neutral. The outside agency is geared to support municipalities at all levels of skills development, it does not play a police role but rather that of a brother supporting the skills development efforts of the municipalities as they strive to be creative in the skills development approach.

Innovation and the development of new knowledge to support policies is a hallmark of the Dutch way of practising HRD effectively. Modern technologies are embraced and the Fund is on the cutting edge e.g. the games and tools being developed as well as the use of social media to enhance HRD experience for employees. Best practice is shared and there is an understanding that “one size fits all” does not work, context differs and knowledge is created all the time in the community of practice.

Next, a synch analysis of the Dutch municipalities are provided. They are different in size and shape and through analysing the four, the reader is provided with a balanced perspective of how HRD activities is implemented within the Dutch local government system. The analysis is undertaken through five focus areas;

- The HRD challenges.
- HRD policy and practice.
- Organisation of the HRD function.
- HRD and management collaboration.
- Internal democracy.
HRD CHALLENGES

No system is perfect and the Dutch municipalities face several challenges on different fronts that all impact on the effective practice of skills development but the Dutch system seems to be working through a strategic approach to addressing the skills development challenges in the municipalities. The Dutch local government system faces many challenges that have an impact on how HRD is implemented and managed, amongst which the following are noted by the A+O Gemeenten Fonds Jaarverslag (A+O Fonds Gemeenten, 2012).

- The municipality, which is close to the citizens, requires employees to have new sets of competencies, i.e. they must be entrepreneurial, independent and solution driven.
- Strategic staff planning is vital: in the short-term municipalities are faced with budget cuts, but over time older employees will have to leave the sector to be replaced by younger employees with higher skills sets. Municipalities will have to invest in the development of older employees as the retirement age of employees is now 67 years, which implies that people will be employed for longer.
- Municipalities are striving to build a more diverse composition of staff at all levels in the organisation.
- Municipalities must find smarter ways of collaborating: working with and through network partners.
- Competency-based education is on the rise (Baars, Camps, Steijn, 2013:Interviews).

HRD POLICY AND PRACTICE

Organisational policy can be described as organisational intent. An organisational policy is the roadmap that defines organisational behaviour; which in turn gives effect to the organisational culture. But good organisational policy does not imply good practice. Typical in many organisations is a mismatch between policy and practice, vision and values, between mission and managerial behaviour. Boselie, Dietz and Boon (2005:7) argue for the importance of distinguishing between HRD policy and practice, stating that organisations may have good policies that may even be supported and endorsed by top management, but there may be a gap between the stated policy intent and the observable actions as experienced by the employees. In this instance, the HRD policies may be experienced by employees as meaningless, unless the employee experiences the policy objective in practice.
A municipal organisational HRD practice should be measured in three diverse ways:

- The presence (whether the policy is present),
- Coverage (the proportion of the workforce that benefits through policy or practice and thirdly its
- Intensity (the degree to which an employee is exposed to the practice or policy).

From the Dutch municipalities researched, the following is observed and applicable.

A clear distinction is made between the HRM and the HRD functions of municipalities. HRM is understood as the administration side i.e. contracts, leave, pensions, salaries etc. whereas HRD is understood to entail increasing the organisational competence base by preparing it to meet its current needs and to prepare for the future through the presentation of a wide range of HRD activities. The broad Dutch municipal policy frameworks all speak to the pivotal role that people play in municipal organisational success as well as to focus on growing the capacity of the municipality through harnessing the talent of all the people. The centrality of HRD is clearly understood and there is alignment in terms of strategic organisational direction and HRD policy delivery.

The matrix approach of the Dordrecht municipality offers the municipality with a snapshot of the municipal competencies in relation to current and future competency needs that is matched to municipal organisational requirements. In this way organisational competency planning is achieved. The competency based functions/job descriptions is useful as employees can develop competencies against their functions. All functions/jobs are linked to competency sets and managers and employees are afforded the opportunity to grow their competencies through a strategic development plan. In that way training for the sake of training is discarded. Competence-based job descriptions are the basis for employees and management. The core of the employee policy is that the manager makes agreements with the employees on their added value, performance, duties, roles, individual development and career. The job description is selected from a set of 40 competencies. Every job ideally has 8 competencies, but all jobs have as core competencies cooperation and the achievement of results. Some jobs may have fewer competencies. Managers therefore have to be able to translate the organisation’s goals for the employees and guide them in this and, together with
the employees, connect these goals to their working situation (Tilburg Transformeert, 2007; Boel, 2013: Interview).

All employees are assessed annually on their results and developmental progress. Since all jobs are results-driven and competence-based, all employees are subject to developmental appraisal. A competency handbook is normally used as a guideline for performance or result improvement. The Dutch make a distinction between a judgemental and a coaching aspect of performance appraisal. There are thus two types of conversations, namely the beoordelingsgesprek, which is a top-down discussion in which the candidate’s performance is assessed by his immediate supervisor; and the funktioneeringsgesprek, which is a bilateral discussion in which the employee and supervisor explore progress and possible areas for improvement in the employee’s work performance (Wiersma & Van den Berg, 1998:71-72). The two most important development actors (line manager and the employee) are actively engaged and supportive of the process. The FG and BG then leads to the development of the Personeel Ontwikkelings Plan (POP). A plan for improved performance is then agreed upon called the “personeel ontwikkelings plan” (POP).

Although some would complain that the “gesprek” takes too long, the positive is that the process is management owned and driven, forcing the manager to stay in touch with those employees entrusted to his care and supervision. This is an activity that cannot be outsourced. The overall conclusions are that both instruments are very useful for development as this is a positive performance management approach not linked to pay or money but purely an opportunity for both manager and employee to engage on a professional level. The POP then becomes a living document that is used for the planning of individual HRD activities and is revisited biannually through the FG and BG process.

All employees are required to develop an individual annual plan (IAP) and the individual development plan (IDP) that connects the generic job description to the actual work situation. Managers can choose from a set of 40 competencies to be developed. The performance appraisal process highlights the development issues that are cascaded to the IDP.

Talent management is undertaken as an approach to development. In the performance appraisal process the employee may disclose knowledge and/or insights that may not have
been known to the manager. This means that management can gain insight into competencies (to be developed) and affinities of employees, who may have qualities which are scarce in the organisation and can be utilised for the greater good of the individual and the organisation (Tilburg Transformeert, 2007; Boel, 2013: Interview).

The implementation of the IDP is supported by coaching. The organisation facilitates this by offering coaching at the career centre. The coaching can take place in-house or can be supported by an outside consultant. The development of the employee is the responsibility of the municipal organisation as well as the employee him/herself (Tilburg Transformeert, 2007; Boel, 2013: Interview).

In the Dongen municipality an HR cycle neatly aligns operational strategy and planning, giving HRD a strategic role instead of an add-on function resulting in HRD implementation on multiple levels (organisational, team and individual). The lifelong learning concept is part of the makeup of the municipality and is implemented through the Individual Loopbaan Budget (ILB). The Dutch provide an additional 1500 Euro over a 3-year period to employees to address labour mobility and employability that gives the employee the opportunity to study further in a specific field of interest.

The HRD shared service model is another innovative concept. The human resource function is primarily located within the shared service centre (SSC), which performs an executive and supportive function for the clients (Drechtsteden). In terms of practical implementation, all HRM/D support services are housed within the SSC with the exception of the largest municipality, Dordrecht, which has maintained the HRD function within the organisation (De Bruin, 2013: Interview). Regional collaboration between municipalities in the Netherlands can thus be considered as a network-based form of government. According to De Bruin (2013: Interview), the shared service is not a perfect system and has its advantages and disadvantages. On the downside, as HR advisor, line managers are clients and advice is provided without considering the rich contextual setting of the HR challenge. The dynamics per organisation are also different, so a “one size fits all” approach is not always desirable in terms of policy implementation. But the clustering of the HR personnel has increased HR organisational learning. The persons who used to be exclusively responsible for HRM at a small municipality now have the added advantage of tapping into broader organisational
knowledge. In the South African model this could be applicable to a District category, where the district could typically offer this service to under-resourced Local municipalities. Alignment and standard setting can then be achieved throughout the District. This is particularly useful for under-resourced Local municipalities.

In most of the Dutch municipalities there is a close alignment between HRD policy and practice. Formal training is not the only recognised option that is used for HRD; the other options include informal on-the-job peer learning and storytelling as a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) methodology; which is a preferred style of delivering occupational skills development. Subsequent research pointed out that in general when training and development programmes are planned, organisations often overemphasise formal planned approaches (for example in management development programmes) in designing their learning and development strategies, suggesting that the informal aspects of WIL holds no currency in the present.

Macneil (2001:246) however suggests that the use of informal learning in the workplace through the facilitation of continuous learning in workplace teams could provide a means of achieving integration between organisation strategy and HRD processes to meet the demands of continuous learning in organisations. In this there is a greater emphasis on flatter organisational hierarchies and the promotion of greater empowerment of individuals. Senge (1990) cited in Poell et al (2004:535) argues that commitment and community is what makes HRD work within organisations. The buddy system allows skills transfer from older to younger employees.

Workplace HRD that is less formal than traditional learning is embedded in the values of the Dutch municipal organisation (Den Bosch, Drechsteden). Skills development is approached from multiple angles as is aptly illustrated in the Dutch example. Municipalities as a matter of course recognise and implement formal and informal learning processes to enable employees to gain competencies which the organisation has identified as being important to its success. External HRD services providers are also used effectively but accreditation of providers is not a prerequisite.
The unlimited budget for skills development per annum as per the Dordrecht municipal way is an excellent example of how operational savings can be channelled to HRD, so money really should not be a problem when it comes to providing development opportunities to people. Of interest is that most municipalities meet and even exceed the national average of 2% budget of payroll that is to be spent to HRD. Considering other informal learning, the investment in skills development could easily exceed 4% HRD spend of payroll.

The learning path chosen by the employee is deliberate and in most cases employees have a direct say in their development. Managers realise that the negative consequence of forcing people to undertake development activities that they don’t have a say in or that they think may not benefit them. There is a difference in approach and motivation of staff with high skills vs. staff with lower skills/education, but that does not mean that lower skilled employees are spoon fed when it comes to accessing development opportunities.

The use of social media skills as a way of work is recognised as well as teaching people how to use new technologies to work better and smarter e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. The coaching/career centre at Tilburg municipality ensures that employees can track their own development and control their own progress. In another organisation organisational storytelling is used as a narrative in the practice of informal skills development practice. Skills development is decentralised. The Department/sector head is responsible for activities related to skills development in the sector and accountability rest with the individual. The skills development menu is attractive and speaks of commitment to innovation and innovative ways of thinking.

A variety of HRD options are available as explained below (Poelsma et al., 2012:1-17).

- **Coaching** – This can take place through the team of trained organisational coaches (internal coaches and or external coaches).

- **Intervention** – This is a professional exchange between employees working in the same field. The group can get together cross-departmentally every 6 weeks around a case study to discuss a problem and then try and find common solutions. The group leader in most cases will be a consultant from outside the organisation.
• **Leadership programme** – All levels of management get together once per quarter and discuss themes, or the worker satisfaction surveys. This can take the form of seminars on a variety of topics.

• **Development and training** – Dordrecht employees periodically discuss their competencies and core values with their managers with a view to improve competence and career potential.

• **The Tiger team** – The ‘Tiger team’ is a team of fifteen employees trained to facilitate creative brainstorm sessions for colleagues. The task of ‘tigers’ is to ensure that the organisation critically evaluates how work is done with a view to improving and considering different ways of organising work.

• **Traineeship for younger employees** – The organisation recruits graduates on a biannual basis for a two-year development programme. Graduates are then employed by the institution at the end of the two-year period.

• **The annual “day of your work”** – The “day of your work” is an annual event when every department organises a workshop, training or excursion on a work-related topic. This can be anything from visiting a local entrepreneur to a workshop. Every employee has an opportunity to attend one or two workshops. The goal of the “day of your work” is to learn about the work of other colleagues in order to encourage collaboration.

• **Pulse employee’s interviews training** – For managers and employees training is offered on how to conduct 360-degree feedback. The organisation gets involved in all aspects of employee wellbeing, including quality of life, health and wellbeing, career development, growth opportunities, talent development programmes, and balance of work and private life.

• **Code 55+ Programme** – Since a third of the workforce is over 55, and in order to plan for the potential “brain drain”, planned programmes for skills transfer and mentorship are organised. The idea is to transfer knowledge to younger colleagues, mentor new colleagues and offer specific training for people who are over 55.

• **Young Talent Programme Drechtsteden** – The organisation strives to be a good employer and runs a programme for young staff in the region. It is a “talent
“programme” and entails an intensive traineeship of two years, combining coaching and peer group learning interventions.

- **DNA dialogues (using the methodology of storytelling)** – The GS leads this discussion and shares information with the directors on a regular basis on matters related to the development of the organisation and DNA. All present then have an opportunity to tell their respective DNA stories. This is to learn from each other as well as to develop DNA skills. This is done in small groups of 10 people in order to allow participants enough time to share their stories.

- **Joint leadership programme** – Since 2009 the organisation has developed a joint leadership programme for all managers. The curriculum devotes extra attention to behavioural aspects. Several plenary sessions and training for all managers are organised. In addition, some managers participate in peer coaching. This is applicable throughout the Drechtsteden as well. The “New Way of Working” as a general theme and desired behaviour of managers is addressed in the joint leadership programme.

**ORGANISATION OF THE HRD FUNCTION**

The organisation of HRD function as observed in the Den Bosch municipality has significant implications. The management philosophy has been built over the span of two decades, giving the municipality a unique sense of appeal. The facilitative line management’s belief and style of working drives the ethos of the municipality, defining the character and social make-up, expressed through top management commitment in action to the vision and mission for people development (Boon; Winthagen, 2013:Interviews).

The organisational design is deliberately flat; the culture is characterised by open decision-making, minimal hierarchy and rules, active involvement of all employees, open and honest communication, internal and external client-focus, as well as teamwork. Den Bosch Municipality can be considered a learning organisation (municipality) that can adapt to the changing environment, choosing to work in an integrated way through the delivery of services as well as in the work processes. The organisational design is decentralised, expressed through five sectors: management affairs, city operations, city development, financial information, and culture and welfare (Boon; Winthagen, 2013:Interviews).
Each sector of the municipality is headed by a director, who in turn has departmental managers reporting to him and who perform the senior management function within the sector. The span of control in the sectors may differ, as may the number of management layers. All sector directors in turn report to the GS and together they form the management nucleus of the municipality (Boon; Winthagen, 2013: Interviews).

In terms of HRD functions, all sectors have HRD managers who have a seat at the sector management table. The HRD manager plays a strategic advisory role on HRD policy and implementation and reports vertically to the sector director and horizontally to the HR head. HRD meetings are scheduled biweekly with the HR head, thus ensuring that HRD receives senior management attention. In total the organisation employs a team of 25 HRD specialists within the HR department (Boon; Winthagen, 2013: Interviews).

Every sector (within a sector there could be more than one department) in the municipality has a department head with HRM/D responsibilities. The department head takes responsibility for the employees and not just the functional aspects but also the developmental side of the employee. Employees are regarded as the human capital of the organisation and as such line managers need to take total responsibility for the employees whom they manage. The HR manager is the right-hand person of the sector director and acts with the “political backing” of the director. The role of the HR manager is to support the department head with his HR responsibilities. But the departmental manager is responsible for the HR decisions (Boon; Winthagen, 2013: Interviews).

Employees need to be motivated to develop themselves and the line manager understands that he must establish the workplace climate. The line manager is expected to ensure that the development of employees takes place whether formally or informally, as a core value of the organisation. The line manager should recognise that the HRD functions within his department and that this cannot be delegated to the HR department or the sector HR manager. HRD activities are core managerial functions throughout the organisation across the different sectors (Ven Rooij; Wageman, 2013: Interviews).
Line manager can be considered as a link between the senior management and the general workers. Macneil; (2001: 248) argues that a fundamental assumption exist that line managers can drive both HRM/D policies and practices which are designed to achieve organisational strategic objectives through identifying, developing and supporting the appropriate knowledge, skill, commitment and performance in people. The Dutch new way of working demands a new skills/behaviour set for managers and co-workers as well as a different style of management. The managerial “boss” style sits uncomfortable in the new way of working that requires a facilitative flexible management orientation that is built on trust and results. This said managers have a key role to play to influence the effective implementation of learning within the workplace.

According to Honey and Mumford(1996) in Poell et al (2004) there are 4 key activities which managers need to undertake in order to develop a supportive HRD climate within organisations.

1. Showing role modeling behaviours
2. Providing HRD opportunities
3. Building HRD into organisational processes
4. Acting as a HRD champion

The central actor in HRD practice in the Dutch municipalities is the Leidinggevende (manager). The following is noted:

- The modern manager is a HRM/D manager. Overall the organisation expects managers to have HRM/D skills, and the role of HR department is then to act as an HRD advisor and not decider.
- Broad understanding and agreement in the Netherlands exist, that the manager cannot develop people. The manager can only create the climate for people development to take place. People are given the space to develop and need to take responsibility for their own development. The manager sets the climate and culture for people development.
- The manager is a role model and there should be alignment with the behaviour of the manager and what the policy says.
• Ongoing professional development of managers is an ongoing endeavour. Two of the municipalities who will be undertaking a cross sectional HRD approach to capacitate their managers (training, coaching and group work). This is also not a short term exercise but will be executed over a 12-18 month period.

• Results driven management means that the manager stays accountable for results, which includes managing the work/task processes as well as the people. This function cannot be delegated to the HR department. This action is frowned upon.

To conclude, the overriding philosophy is that “management believes that people can work everywhere and need not be supervised, management needs to motivate people from the heart, people need to work for themselves and the organisation needs motivated people, I believe that people are motivated when you are given the opportunity to design their own work, yes the manager is responsible for results, but he/she creates the environment for success. It is easier to be a boss and to tell people what to do, and some people like this, but we believe that people should decide for themselves and take responsibility for their results and for their own development. We don’t want to teach people tricks, we want to empower them …” (Boone: 2013).

HRD AND MANAGEMENT COLLABORATION

The selected municipalities in the Netherlands are at various levels of development, in terms of design and skills development positioning and readiness for managerial collaboration. The traditional organisational design views skills development as part of the line management function in a HR department. In this various management designs were observed that could easily be replicated in South Africa. The following are offered as practical examples that could be considered.

The Dordrecht SSC for skills development breaks the traditional way of individual development since it offers an innovative approach to skills development. This could potentially be useful to smaller organisations which may not enjoy access to resources of the bigger municipalities. All members have equal access to quality skills development support. Besides the service to the members, the greatest potential benefit is the pooling of HR
knowledge as the HR specialists can tap into each other’s network, knowledge and experience. In addition, the SSC model offers specific training to staff. Building in-house capacity to deliver skills development is tried and tested. The fact that the municipality have their own central training and trainers that offer services throughout the region/district also adds to a cost saving.

The Den Bosch sector HR manager model offers the HRD practitioner a seat at the sector executive table. In this way, there is “political” backing for skills development. This is in no way an abdication of skills development activities; on the contrary, the director continues to be the responsible person for skills development but has the comfort that the efforts are supported by an HR expert.

There is a shift from the hierarchical type of municipality with layers and layers of management, instead organisations are opting for flatter, faster and flexible designs that are integrated. The organisational orientation and emphasis is on the delivery of quality HRD service and support within agreed frameworks and service standards. This is sometimes referred to as flexible network as is the case of the Dordrecht municipality and the Tilburg municipalities respectively.

One of the central actors in the effective implementation of HRD practice is the line manager. It is at this level of interaction where employees experience skills development policy in practice. Although the HR department can be regarded as the custodian of the HRD policy, often there is a difference between the intended, implemented and perceived HRD practices. A dynamic relationship then exists between the custodians of HRD policy (the HR department) and the implementers of HRD practice (line managers). The devolution of HRD development duties to line managers is therefore regarded as an important variable for effective implementation. In the Dutch municipalities researched, the HR departments in general and the line managers form an effective partnership to ensure for the effective implementation of HRD policies in the workplace.
INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

Internal democracy in the workplace is a well-established practice in the Dutch public system. The *Ondernemingsraad* (worker councils) is an established forum that does not replace the trade union, but is a platform where the employer can engage actively with the worker council to ensure that HR policies and procedures are followed. As confirmed by Winthagen (2013:Interview), *we have a legal duty to give information, ask advice or seek agreement on topics. It is an instrument for support for policy.* Whereas trade unions negotiate on income and job security, the work councils focus on more substantive matters where knowledge of the organisation is needed.

Members of the worker councils are elected and serve an initial three-year term. The members can be members of the trade union through a system of proportional representation. There are varieties in terms of the organisation of the workers councils. In some municipalities, there are corporate workers’ councils (one council for the entire municipality) and divisional workers’ councils. However, the divisional workers’ council’s members all have a seat in the corporate workers’ council; in this way internal democracy is decentralised. The worker councils meet monthly as well as on incidental issues in addition to the meetings that are scheduled within the divisions. The worker councils have a regular newsletter, utilise social media and hold meetings, which all enhance communication. In this way employees are kept informed on the latest HR developments (Winthagen, 2013:Interview; Evers, 2013:Interview; Harbers, 2014:1-65). All the above have implications on how HRD is practised in municipalities, as it is about excellent service delivery that is supported by innovative HRD practices.

CONCLUSION

There are many valuable lessons that can be learnt from the Dutch municipal practice of HRD. The Dutch system of local government is well established and the institutional structure places employees at the centre of the Dutch efforts to build responsive municipalities. For HRD practices to work at the municipal sphere requires political and top management support.
that goes beyond talk. The line managers, employees and the HR department are all important actors that gives a face to the HRD policy and practice.

It seems from the Dutch municipalities that HRD choices are made, based on conviction and a predetermined vision, with the line manager, employees and the HR department as central actors. The human resource department performs a functionary supportive role, with the accountability with the line manager, who knows what is happening in the workplace and on the “municipal factory floor”. A non-threatening environment is created for employees and line managers are open and attuned to providing feedback (both positive and negative). This feedback then forms the platform from where managers provide opportunities for employees to develop. Ultimately the development depends also on the individual employee. This forms the basis of HRD practice in the Dutch local government system.

For HRD to work optimally in South African municipalities (is it does in the Netherlands) requires political and senior management support that goes beyond talk and policies. This is needs to be backed up by evidence/behaviour. It is ultimately management and not policies that gives a face to the change. The municipality cannot say one thing (policy) and behave in another way (choice). This means that management HRD choices are made based on conviction and predetermined organisational/departmental skills development vision with the manager as the central actor. In such an environment, employees and managers are open and attuned to give feedback (both positive and negative). Of importance is an organisational HRD belief backed up and supported by evidence that allows opportunities to and for employees to work independently and collaboratively across organisational boundaries.
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