

# Employment Equity Consideration and Continued Skills Shortages in South Africa: Parallel Evidence from Literature and Empirical Investigation

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**ABSTRACT** There is a need to continually test the impulse of the South African society in view of some new ideas that are beginning to emerge that call for flexibility in the continued implementation of the affirmative action policy (AA) in order to help South Africa build a skills base. The objectives of this paper include the review of literature and conducting empirical research in order to assess the impact of AA policy in relation to skills shortages in South Africa; determine whether AA contributes to turnover of professionals in the country; and whether AA should be discontinued or not. The study adopted survey research method using quantitative research design. Convenience sampling was used in the selection of participating organisations. Respondents consist of 160 Training and Development Managers in each of the participating organisations cutting across both the public and private sectors. The research results showed that majority of the respondents did not believe that AA is responsible for skills lost in their organisations. Similarly, most of the respondents agreed that AA should not be scrapped. Implementation of AA should be flexible enough to accommodate highly skilled professionals from the previously advantaged group in order to alleviate skills shortages.

## INTRODUCTION

The debate as to whether the affirmative action (AA) policy is still relevant and desirable considering the unabating skills shortages in South Africa has been raging for some time now. While some people advocate for the continued retention of AA, others argued that the policy has outlived its usefulness and should be discontinued forthwith. This has necessitated the Deputy President of South Africa, Kgalema Motlanthe to call for a scientific investigation into the issue in order to enable government take an informed decision based on a well articulated and considered opinion. For now, the debate is ongoing and while investigation (as suggested by Motlanthe) is continuing, employment equity consideration remains a condition for employers of labour while scarcity of essential skills that are required to drive sustainable economic growth in South Africa persists.

Other countries in the world (for example, USA, UK, Zimbabwe, and Namibia) have histories of AA policy. However, implementation of AA policy in the United States of America (USA) is of particular importance to South Africa given the similarities in the historical background of

the major beneficiaries (for example, Blacks) of AA policy in the two countries. The Black component of the AA policy in America was based on the recognition of the African-Americans who suffered historically from racial discriminations, as well as other minorities such as the Hispanic-Americans who were also subjected to unfair labour practices. Affirmative action policy was initially introduced in America in the 1960s (Aka 2009) for the advancement of African-Americans but was later extended to cover other minority groups such as American-Indians, Hispanics, Asians, women and later, the disabled persons. According to the American Association for Affirmative Action (AAAA 2011), the purpose of affirmative action is to give "our nation a way to finally address the systemic exclusion of individuals of talent on the basis of their gender, or race from opportunities to develop, perform, achieve and contribute. Affirmative action is an effort to develop systematic approach to open the doors of education, employment, and business development opportunities to qualified individuals who happen to be members of groups that have experienced long-standing and persistent discrimination."

Women came to be regarded as a disadvantaged group and potential beneficiaries of

AA measures for the first time following the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1960 (Boikhutso 2004). The disabled people became a further focus of AA in the aftermath of the Vietnam War in 1975. The similarities in the implementation of AA measures in America and South Africa lies in the beneficiaries, that is, the minority groups (Blacks), women and the disabled persons.

While there has been progress in the implementation of AA measures in America, the argument has been that it is relatively slow, with business, employee recruitment and promotion remaining largely restrictive with little or no discernible advancement for blacks, women and disabled persons (Boikhutso 2004). The failure of AA measures in America has implications for South Africa. For instance, AA legislation in America was not known to have significantly advanced the employment and promotion of the previously disadvantaged groups. Agcos and Burr, Johnson, Lattimer (cited in Samuel 2010) note the progress that has been made in the representation of formerly disadvantaged groups in the US workplace. However, even with this apparent success, almost half the states in the USA are moving to abolish affirmative action due to the view that, after 30 years, this policy has become counter-productive and has outlived its usefulness (Johnson as cited in Samuel 2010). One of the shortcomings of affirmative action in the USA is that the focus of affirmative action has been on numbers, with no due regard being paid to training and development of selected candidates. This has consequently led to little investment in human capital.

These shortcomings in the American experience are very visible in the South African labour market today. While AA legislation emphasized the appointment of persons from the previously disadvantaged group, the training and development of these candidates, especially in fields such as science, engineering, technology, medical science, accounting and business have remained slow. This, perhaps must have accounted for the inability of employers to source sufficient job candidates from this group because they are in short supply whereas employers may not be able to appoint candidates from the previously advantaged group with such skills for reasons of demographic balancing as required by the AA legislation. This labour practice has, therefore, been seen as a contributory factor to

the general skills shortages being experienced in South Africa now. It is against the background of this problem statement that this paper sought to know the relationship between continued implementation of AA and skills shortages in South Africa.

### Objectives

The objectives of the paper are stated as follows:

- 1) To evaluate the contribution of AA policy to scarcity of essential skills in South Africa;
- 2) To investigate the impact of AA policy on turnover of professionals (especially whites) in South Africa; and
- 3) To ascertain whether AA policy should be discontinued or sustained.

### An Overview of Affirmative Action Measures in South Africa

The subsistent skills shortage in South Africa has been variously and consistently attributed to apartheid rule which discriminated against the education, training and employment of black people (Wagner 2001; Erasmus and Steyn 2002). It, therefore, became imperative for the post-apartheid government in South Africa to initiate programmes and policies that would redress past injustices, promote social justice and eradicate inequalities amongst the citizenry. Some of these policy and programme interventions were specifically aimed at preventing discrimination at workplaces and to promote accelerated employment and advancement of the previously disadvantaged group (Africans, Indians, disabled persons and white females).

One of the policy intervention mechanisms was the introduction of AA measures in 1994 (Bandix 2001). AA refers to the purposeful and planned placement or development of competent or potentially competent persons in or to positions from which they were barred in the past, in an attempt to redress past disadvantages and render the workplace more representative of the population (Bandix 2001). The definition by Idasa (as cited in Boikhutso 2004) is more descriptive of the intent and purposes of AA as it relates to employment. Thus, AA

*consists of temporary positive measures or intervention aimed at preferential treatment*

*in appointment, promotion, training and development of designated groups (blacks, women and disabled persons) in order to accelerate and advance them – thus creating equal employment opportunities for all (Boikhetso 2004: 53).*

Affirmative action policy has come under severe criticism by some sections in South Africa (particularly the Afrikaner and White communities) which described the policy as discriminatory and racially based. Concurring, Dr. Temba Masilela (cited in Nxumalo 2010:53) states that:

*AA is characteristically complex and controversial, conceived as race-based, quota-driven, and preferential treatment of historically disadvantaged groups. AA contradicts fundamental principles of liberal ideology by prioritising group or collective rights over the individual as the beneficiary of rights.*

In order for the AA to be effective and functional, the Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998) was enacted to give legal backing to the AA measure and ensure compliance by employers of labour. The Act sought, among other things, to eliminate all forms of discriminations as well as the establishment of specific measures to accelerate and advance the employment of persons from the designated group (Coetzee 2005). The controversies and problems surrounding AA seem to arise not from the principle, but from the manner in which it is implemented. For example, Bendix (2001) asserts that implementation of AA leads to the appointment of persons (from designated groups) to fill “AA” positions without due consideration of their suitability for such positions or the possibility of support and development. This, according to Bendix (2001), leaves other employees (previously advantaged) dissatisfied and at the same time unfair to the AA appointees since they are placed in meaningless positions or cannot function efficiently in the positions they have been placed due to lack of experience.

Both situations described above may lead to frustration and ultimately translate to turnover of the affected employees as a result of perceived organisational injustice on the part of the ‘previously advantaged’ employee and job dissatisfaction suffered by the ‘AA employee’. This argument is theoretically rooted in Adams (1964) equity theory (cited in Spector 2008) which postulates that individuals who perceive themselves as either under-rewarded or over-re-

warded will experience distress, and that this leads to efforts to restore equity within the organisation. Failing to find any, Hellriegel et al. (2008:276) argue that they may behave in ways that harm the organisation. For example, they may quit, and when high performers leave the organisation, the company loses its productive talent and the capacity to gain competitive edge. If dissatisfied employees stay, they may react by withholding effort in order to restrict output or lower quality, or embark on deliberate sabotage of equipment. This may also put the organisation at competitive disadvantage. An under-rewarded employee tend to show feelings of hostility to the organisation and perhaps their co-employees which may lead to reduced productivity and this may impair the overall performance of the organisation especially when a high performing employee is involved. Furthermore, Adam (1965) in Spector (2008) posits that guilt is induced with over-payment as the person who gets too much may feel guilty or same while the person who gets too little may feel angry or humiliated.

Implementation of AA appears to be a contributory factor to the problem of skills shortages presently suffered by South African organisations. Breier (2009) remarks that one of the effects of AA has been the depletion of senior professionals and trade workers who might be able to mentor newcomers. Any new graduate needs induction into the workplace, but the need is particularly great for those who gained little or no work experience in the course of their training. Furthermore, Coetzee (2005) states that one of the most problematic aspects of AA is the acute shortage of suitably qualified persons from the designated group to fill vacant top positions. This has led to the constant poaching by other organisations thus leaving many top positions (particularly in public sector organisations) unfilled. Supporting this assertion are Coetzee (2005), Maisela (2001:53) who confirms that many South African organisations are experiencing a high turnover of black executives who are constantly poached by competitor organisations.

The Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998) (EEA) which was enacted in terms of the AA compelled employers to give preferential treatment to employees from the previously disadvantaged race/groups (that is, Blacks, Indians, coloureds, disabled persons and white

women) in terms of recruitment and selection. This measure creates a lot of vacant positions for Black professionals, who are already in short supply. Bennett (2003: 1), Maisela (2001: 53) also adds that many South African organisations are experiencing a high turnover of Black executives who are constantly poached by competitor organisations. These Black executives are often used to win tenders from government departments and parastatals. Also concurring, empirical research by Thomas et al. (2000) and Jain et al. (2003) found that Black employees frequently move from one organisation to another for higher salaries and related perks due to their inability to fit into historically established corporate cultures. van As (2001: 43) points out that the implementation of the Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998) has forced organisations to balance their employment portfolio in a manner that enables skilled Black professionals the opportunity to hop from one job to another thus making their retention difficult.

#### **The Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998)**

The Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998) was established to achieve equity in the workplace by a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and b) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the injustice in employment experienced by designated groups, and to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. The Act requires that employers give due consideration to “suitably qualified persons” in their recruitment of designated groups. This means such a designated person may not possess the requisite qualifications to occupy a position, but such a person may be deemed to be qualified once he/she has formal educations, prior training, relevant experience, or capacity to acquire – within reasonable time – the ability to do the job (Jain et al. 2003). The perceived injustices (for example, arbitrary appointment and promotion of equity candidates to fill ‘AA’ positions) that is inherent in the implementation of AA and EEA can, in the view of Coetzee (2005:3) results into dislike for a job and indeed an organisation therefore prompting a high performing employee to voluntarily quit.

Expressing a similar view to that of Coetzee and Breier (2009) assert that

*one of the unintended consequences of employment equity is the ‘leakage’ from the economy of white graduates with scarce skills. While employment equity (EE) is a strategy to redress historical imbalances, our country cannot afford to lose too many engineers. The question of a possible moratorium on EE needs to be thoroughly and maturely debated, based on research into the loss of scarce skills professionals within the context of ‘binding constraints’ on economic growth and the consequent lack of service delivery to the poor”. Fransman concluded by noting that “the existence of a ‘second economy trap’ is arguably the most important historical imbalance that needs to be redressed in South Africa currently.*

Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, former Vice-Chancellor and former managing director of the World Bank concurs with Fransman. Accordingly, Ramphele (cited in Breier 2009) declares that “given the many concerns expressed across the board, and the tough global skills market, it is surprising we are not examining the impact of employment equity on our performance as a nation”. It will be inappropriate to put an unskilled or inexperienced person in a position in which performance is impossible. Ramphele further argues that the government needs to acknowledge that mistakes have been made in the implementation of EEA. Other authors have, however disagreed with Fransman and Ramphele. For example, the then Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka was reported as saying that AA has come to stay, at least until the imbalances of the past are reversed (Breier 2009). Mlambo-Ngcuka further suggests that AA should indeed be called “corrective action” because there were still too many formerly disadvantaged people, especially women and the disabled people who had not benefited from the government EE policy (Breier 2009:17). Reacting to Fransman’s suggestion, the then Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana was reported to have labelled Fransman ‘a dreamer’ for calling for a moratorium on AA (Breier 2009). Implementation of AA equally poses recruitment difficulty in respect of successfully developed talent (mostly white males) who could not enter the labour market because of their equity status. These include fresh graduates with innovative ideas and ability to make the difference in the workplaces.

Employers, especially from the private sector has often criticised AA as an imposition of unqualified employees on them at the expense of more qualified white male candidates (Coetzee 2005). They argued that if organisations appoint people from the previously disadvantaged groups merely for the sake of meeting employment equity targets without considering the value they bring to the organisation, such appointments could, in the long term, lead to increased labour costs, reduced profits, retrenchment of workers or even business closure (Coetzee 2005:8). This practice has been perceived to undermine and violate the concept of organisational fairness (procedural and distributive justice perceptions) which is an antecedent to employee intention to quit (Gilliland 1993). The implication of the implementation of AA policy has therefore been regarded as a contributory factor to the present skills shortage being experienced in South Africa as many highly competent employees from the previously advantaged group left the country to take up appointments abroad as a result of perceived injustice and discrimination inherent in the implementation of AA policy.

In a report by Bosman (2007), some Afrikaners declared that “both the Constitution and the Freedom Charter are clear about equal rights for all, and that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White. In practice, however, this ideal is nullified by the policies of affirmative action and employment equity”. These policies have severe implications for government, its course of action and service delivery. The vacancy rate in government departments is estimated at 30% of staff, while the acceptable norm is about 5%. There are similarly high vacancy rates in provincial and local governments. In the Department of Land Affairs alone there are 1 000 vacancies. This is the lead agency tasked with ensuring the success of land reform and the transfer of 30% agricultural land by 2014. But with an acute shortage of skilled personnel this target will remain a pipe dream. It is no use blaming White farmers for the slow pace of land reforms when the department cannot cope with the demands of its own targets (Bosman 2007).

### **Affirmative Action Policy and Skills Shortage**

The effect of AA on skills shortage has become so critical that Gwede Mantashe, General

Secretary of the African National Congress (ANC) (the ruling political party in South Africa) declared that “affirmative action and employment equity policies will not be allowed to stand in the way of municipalities and local authorities hard hit by skills shortages” (Nxumalo 2008:1). Mantashe further reiterate that:

*there were at least 70 municipal authorities in the country without a single engineer or artisan. South Africa is running so short of skills that affirmative action cannot realistically be considered an issue. Important statistics show that unless we produce at least 2400 engineers and artisans a year we are not going to cope with the skills shortages in the country.*

Concurring with Mantashe, Dawid Botha, the Executive Director of the South African Institute of Civil Engineers (SAICE), said “the shortage of engineers and technicians is a national problem heading for disaster”. Allyson Lawless, a former president of SAICE, said “there are currently less than three civil engineers for every 100 000 people in South Africa”. A survey conducted by Lawless shows that 79 of the country’s 231 local Municipalities do not have civil engineers, technologists or technicians. Botha confirms this and maintains that there are more than 1,000 vacancies for these skills at municipalities countrywide (Hermann 2008). Mantashe further states that “compounding the skills crisis in South Africa today was that the country was saddled with a rapidly ageing artisan population with an average age of 54 years and practically no decent national programmes of training younger people are in place” (Nxumalo 2008:1).

Consistent with Mantashe’s view, Dr. Temba Masilela (cited in Nxumalo 2010: 3) asserts that “while AA remains government’s policy, some new ideas are beginning to emerge that calls for flexibility to help South Africa build a skills base”. In an address to the Afrikaner Union Solidarity, President Jacob Zuma admitted that AA should be flexible enough to enable the country to tackle skills shortages” (Nxumalo 2010: 3). Proffering a solution to the skills problem (that is, barring AA), the president of the Afrikaans Handel-sintitut (AHI), Venete Klein, states that the organisation had a broad range of hard skills that could contribute directly in alleviating the skills and business management crisis in most municipalities in the country. “We have got a lot of skills that could add a lot of value in the areas

of housing, healthcare, finance and many other critical areas, if we join hands and work together, success will be to the benefit of all South Africans" (Nxumalo 2008: 1).

In view of the literature reviewed above, this paper hypothesised that:

**H1: AA Policy Contributes to the General Skills Shortages in South Africa**

One other major concern articulated for skills shortages by Breier (2009) is the loss of senior capacity, largely as a result of AA, which has led to many experienced (white) professionals leaving their posts and often also the country. The lack of senior capacity is hampering the ability of the workforce to absorb young entrants – one of the reasons for the existence of shortages alongside a pool of unemployed graduates. Finally, Breier (2009) contends that there are shortages that are associated with poor working conditions, particularly in the health sector. Like the education system, the public health sector has been historically under-funded and neglected, with rural facilities mostly affected. The education system is still struggling to overcome decades of 'neglect and dysfunction' under apartheid (Adler 2002) when the education of black people (particularly Africans) was under-funded and of poor quality. The effect is that there is still a very small pool of matriculants who, Breier (2009) notes, have the necessary grades and subjects to access programmes like engineering, medicine and accounting. Furthermore, there are particularly few African and coloured students in this pool, and this contributes a very severe limitation at a time when programmes like these are required to achieve a more representative student population and their professions are required to meet employment equity criteria.

Consistent with documented evidence from literature as articulated above (for example, Breier 2009), this study hypothesised that:

**H2: There is a Relationship between AA Policy and Loss of Senior Capacity in Organisations**

**METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted survey research method using quantitative research design. A self-ad-

ministered questionnaire was used to gather primary data from respondents. The survey research strategy is an effective tool to get opinions, attitudes and descriptions as well as getting cause-and-effect relationships. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) describe surveys and questionnaires as among the most popular data collection methods in business and social science research.

**Research Population**

Since skills shortages cut across all sectors of the economy, the target population of the study comprised of both public and private sector organisations based in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. For practical purpose, the study covered 160 selected organisations in Port-Elizabeth, East-London and Bhishe towns.

**Sampling/Research Participants**

Convenience sampling was used in selecting the 160 organisations that participated in the survey. Respondents consist of Training and Development Managers/ Development and Equity Practitioners in each of the participating organisations. This study is a component of a larger study which borders on human resource development and skills shortages. This explains why respondents were limited to Training and Development Managers in the selected organisations only. The research participants are knowledgeable about the complexity of skills shortages, employee recruitment and turnover, and application of the Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998).

**Measuring Instrument**

A self-developed survey questionnaire was used as a data gathering instrument for the study. The questionnaire was developed after a comprehensive review of the literature had been undertaken, thus enriching the construct validity of the instrument. The research questionnaire had an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82 confirming its reliability. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.5 and above is recommended as appropriate for any measuring instrument.

### Statistical Analysis

Chi-Square statistical method was used to establish whether there is any relationship between the constructs as hypothesised in the study.

## RESULTS

The following section presents and discusses the statistical results of the hypotheses testing.

### Hypothesis 1: AA Policy Contributes to the General Skills Shortages in South Africa

Respondents were almost equally divided over the contribution of affirmative action to skills shortage with about 52% disagreeing that implementation of affirmative action results in skills loss. This position is supported by a Chi-square values of  $t=2.28$  with an associated p-value of 0.131.

The research further found that 26% of respondents suggested that affirmative action measure should be discontinued forthwith while 74% were of the opinion that AA should not be discontinued with a Chi-Square values of  $t=117.39$  with an associated p-value of  $<0001$ .

### Hypothesis 2: There is a Relationship between AA Policy and Loss of Senior Capacity in Organisations

About 73% of respondents do not believe they are losing their skilled employees as a result of AA policy. This is supported with a Chi-Square values of  $t=119.46$  with an associated p-value of  $<0002$ . The hypothesis is therefore rejected as stated.

## DISCUSSION

Supporting the findings that AA contributes to shortage of critical skills in the economy, research survey by the Centre for development and Enterprise (CDE 2007) suggests that "government's insistence on ambitious transformation goals is constricting the skills market further, driving competition for skilled black staff in a situation where whites - the largest available pool of skilled people - are no longer freely employable." The survey also reports difficul-

ties in recruiting skilled black employees, including problems of poaching, along with the salary premium required to retain skilled black personnel. Due to the problems identified in the report, it can be concluded that the skills shortage is being driven, in part, by the unintended consequences of empowerment policies, the survey report concluded. Similarly, Consulting Engineers South Africa (CESA 2007) notes that some factors identified by business as contributing to the current skills shortage in South Africa are crime, emigration, affirmative action, more lucrative pay packages abroad and a dearth of matriculants who have passed Mathematics and Science on the higher grade, which is compulsory for studying tertiary engineering courses.

The finding of this paper regarding loss of highly skilled South Africans as a result of AA is inconsistent with the view of Breier (2009). Breier found that organisations are losing their senior managers as a result of AA, which has led to many experienced (white) professionals leaving their posts and in most cases, leaving the country for better opportunities overseas.

Supporting Breier, however, is a research finding by Nxumalo (2008). Nxumalo (2008: 1) reports one of the white professionals working abroad as follows:

*As a previously advantaged resident and a skilled artisan I had to find work overseas to support my family. While in South Africa unemployed, each time I applied for a vacant position, I was told that most of the positions were for affirmative candidates. South Africa needs to think about this; they keep lowering the standards of education and training to fast track the transition. This is only to the detriment of the country. They would have to do a lot to make me want to come back to work in South Africa.*

In a similar manner, another South African mechanical engineer working in the United Kingdom asserts that "every time I go on holidays I can see the need for skills in our country but I will not go back soon because of poor salary and the affirmative action policies in the country" (Nxumalo 2008). Succinctly put, Mabotja (2009) asserts that:

*The best approach is to look at the skills shortage and its attendant 'fatal' constraints more soberly and as it obtains, without any politicisation of the issue. Where under-utilisation and measures to subterfuge the promo-*

*tion of affirmative action are manifest, it is best to caution the perpetrators and implement the requisite corrective actions expeditiously.*

However, continued retention of AA may further accelerate emigration of white professionals from the country. According to a study report by the South African Institute of Race Relations, one million of white South Africans left the country between 1996 and 2006 due to crime and AA (van Aardt 2006). The report further states that “because the crime figures are not going to decline rapidly and AA is to continue, more whites are going to leave the country”.

The present research finding indicates that virtually all the organisations surveyed subjects their recruitment policy to the relevant provision of the AA policy. However, some professionals argued that the main aim of AA policy was to attempt to create equality of the workforce of South Africa as a whole by enforcing the advantaging of the previously disadvantaged and the disadvantaging of the previously advantaged (Coetzee 2005). This results in businesses having to consider the social background of any potential applicant instead of making decisions purely based on qualifications and experience. Instead of using this type of policy, it has been suggested by critics that a policy of qualification equality should be used. This would allow businesses to focus on employing the person with the highest qualifications, the most experience candidate and with the best recommendations. To allow previously disadvantaged individuals to achieve these qualifications and experience, critics suggest that the government should place more emphasis on the secondary and tertiary education, as well as subsidise companies wishing to employ entry level applicants.

### CONCLUSION

The research results presented above suggest that 1) there is no significant relationship between skills scarcity in the organisations surveyed and implementation of AA. 2) Significant percentage (73%) of respondents in the survey indicated that AA is desirable in the workplace and should not be scrapped now. These findings are inconsistent with extant literature (especially from the antagonists of AA), but consistent with those of the protagonists of the policy. For example: affirmative action may be a

race-based strategy, but it is aimed at achieving a race-blind end. If you remove the race criteria of affirmative action, it would be tantamount to denying that apartheid targeted black people.

Furthermore, the group argues that “employment equity is far from reaching its goals and white women must be excluded in its future enactment”. On whether AA should be discontinued, the group submits that “it defies logic that a sunset clause on affirmative action is even being discussed”.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

While opinions on the desirability or otherwise of AA policy in the contemporary workplaces in South Africa remained divergent, scientific research into the issue should be encouraged in order to assist government in arriving at an informed decision. Furthermore, while it is important for the government to redress past injustices through employment equity, it is equally of utmost importance to guide against sacrificing competence for mediocrity. Qualified and experienced people, regardless of equity status should be appointed to manage strategic positions so that quality and standards are not compromised. A situation where people are promoted above their competence in the workplace could result in poor service delivery, which represents a disservice to the general society. Government should encourage a systematic training and transfer of knowledge from senior and well experienced public officers to other employees with less experience. This will guarantee a competent and functional public service that will have the capacity to enhance and consistently sustain improved service delivery.

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