

The importance of learnerships in South Africa



The Skills Development component of B-BBEE is critical for companies to comply with B-BBEE legislation. How can learnerships maximise a company's B-BBEE score for Skills Development?

What are learnerships?

Learnerships are a relatively new training method that the South African skills development system has adopted to address unemployment and skills shortages in the country. Incorporating several role players and having multiple objectives, learnerships have been hailed as one of the effective ways to address unemployment by encouraging industry to participate in *skills development* while at the same time propelling employment equity.

Who are the role players for learnership implementation?

The implementation of learnerships requires three central role players, namely the learner, the employer and the training provider. Learnerships in South Africa can be industry funded or SETA (Sector Education and Training Authority) funded. A critical element of the learnership model is the workplace component as this is what differentiates learnerships from other models of learning. A learnership allows learners to acquire experience as they must spend 70% of the learnership period in the workplace where they must apply the knowledge gained in the classroom. This ensures that by the end of the learnership programme, the learner would have gained workplace experience as well as a qualification.

What are the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) benefits of learnerships?

Learnerships are critical in fulfilling the Skills Development component of B-BBEE.

Proper implementation of learnerships will enable companies to maximise their B-BBEE points. This also ensures industry involvement in the country's skills development mandate.

Learnerships and tax incentives

The learnership tax incentive, as provided for in section 12(H) of the Income Tax Act 58 of 1962, serves as an effective impetus for industry to become involved in the implementation of learnerships as companies can earn *learnership tax rebates* when doing so.

What are the implementation processes for learnerships?

The success of the learnership implementation process is guided by the legislative backing created to regulate the scheme amongst the role players, namely the learner, the SETAs, the training provider and the employer. For industry-funded learnerships, the employer plays a dual role as the sponsor of the programme as well the workplace provider who should ensure that the learner is able to implement in practice the theoretical knowledge they acquire in the classroom. The learnership contracts can therefore be referred to as tripartite contracts or agreements as they guide the relationship among the three main role players in the learnership programme, namely the learner, the employer and the training provider. The SETAs regulate the relationships among these three role players.

Conclusion

The Skills Development component of B-BBEE is critical for companies to comply with B-BBEE legislation. Learnerships can maximise a company's B-BBEE score for the Skills Development component and earn tax rebates for employers. Most employers, however, shy away from implementing learnerships because the process is cumbersome and involves a lot of administrative work. SERR Synergy recognises that industry involvement in learnerships is critical and therefore performs the supportive role of effectively managing learnerships for its clients by ensuring that all legislative processes are followed and by dealing with all the administrative work that comes with the implementation of learnerships according to the company's B-BBEE requirements.

About the Author: Pedzisai Maririmba joined SERR Synergy in October 2016 and she is the Learnership Project Manager at our Pretoria Offices. She holds a BSC in Media and Society studies, an LLB from UNISA and an LLM in Mercantile Law from the University of Pretoria. She has been working in the Skills and development sector for the past 12 years.

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