

SOME CHALLENGES OF USING CONTRACT WORKERS IN AN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTION – A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

A C LESSING (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES, UNISA)

M W DE WITT (DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION, UNISA)

Abstract: As an open and distance learning institution, the University of South Africa attracts thousands of students which results in an overwhelming number of assignments and examination scripts that need to be marked. Marking, which is an important part of the task of the lecturer and the main personal feedback mechanism to students, needs to be done timeously and diligently. The submission of assignments causes peak periods of high workload that is not manageable for the lecturers. To remain competitive and efficient and to save money the university makes use of (temporary) contract workers to support lecturers during these peak times. In spite of the expected valuable contribution it seems that the system of contract workers is not efficient and academic staff utters many complaints in this regard. This article reflects on a qualitative investigation into the matter of managing and using contract workers to assist lecturers in marking assignments and examination scripts. The problems experienced by lecturers are critically reviewed in terms of the application of various managerial functions. From the results it seems that many problems are the result of inefficient application of managerial functions and it is recommended that proper guidelines should be put in place.

Key phrases: contract workers, management, Open and Distance Learning, ODL institution, distance learning, marking of assignments

1 INTRODUCTION

The use of contract workers in a business setting – and even in the agricultural field – is common practice. It offers various benefits to management and contributes to higher profitability and quicker task completion. In a sense this usage of external labour can be referred to as “labour leverage” in the same way that “financial leverage” refers to the use of external financial resources. As such, the use of contract workers in a work place is not out of line of management thinking.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on an investigation of the use of contract workers in an academic setting. The relevance and significance of this research lies in the fact that the use of contract workers is a practice that is used in numerous academic departments at various tertiary institutions in South Africa. In spite of this wide-spread use of contract workers in academic settings, no documented research

could be traced in this regard – not even with an intensive literature search and consulting of various databases. The lack of documented research in the specific context of an academic institution – and an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in particular – stresses the importance of reflecting on this specific investigation. The results of this research will not only be of value to the institution where the research was done, but could also be of value of all academic situations – even in a residential setup. This article has a unique focus in reflecting on the management of contract workers at an ODL institution and as such contributes to subject knowledge.

The research was done in one faculty of Unisa, an ODL institution that recorded a total enrolment of 292 000 students in 2010 (Unisa 2011:Internet). As a distance education institution limited face-to-face contact between lecturers and students takes place. Unisa provides all their students with email addresses, although not all students have access to email and electronic media due to their circumstances. Therefore, hard copies of study guides and tutorial letters, delivered by the South African Post Office, are still the most common ways of communicating with students. This is supplemented by feedback remarks provided in assessing the assignments.

This investigation is important because improving aspects of the contract system may enhance better comprehensive support to lecturers and will reduce frustration and improve the work life of the academic staff as well as the academic experience of the students. This issue is significant not only because it is unique to an ODL institution, but it may also be representative of problems experienced in other departments in Unisa as well as other learning institutions. Other (residential) institutions of learning may also take note of the value of proper management and utilisation of their contract staff. Large numbers of students enrol at Unisa for different modules. Therefore, lecturers in a specific module at Unisa may each be responsible for the assessment of assignments (at least two per module per student per year) and examination papers of more than four thousand students. In the light of this, it would be impossible for lecturers to do proper assessment in the limited time span and to give extensive feedback timeously as required in teaching and expected by the students.

In line with international best practices, Conway & Briner (2002:279) state that “organizations have turned to part-time employees to provide greater scheduling flexibility, meet market demands more efficiently, and reduce wage and benefit costs”. Ferndale, Paauwe and Hoeksema (2009:544) also stress the importance of downsizing, outsourcing, and redesigning the organisation to ensure that it remains competitive and efficient, and is able to make the most of economies of scale and scope. In line with the view of Merk (2009:600), Unisa outsources the labour-intensive aspects of the education business by using contract workers for marking of assignments and examination papers, which implies that the university does not have to take responsibility for the markers as an employed component. Thus, for sound financial reasons Unisa follows a policy of appointing contract workers on an annual basis to assist lecturers to cope with the enormous and unrealistic workload.

Most of the contracts is aimed at the marking of assignments and examination papers during peak periods, while only a few contracts include the full range of academic responsibilities. The fact is that Unisa would have to increase its permanent staff complement considerably if it were not for the contract workers. The use of the (temporary) contract workers has many advantages. For Unisa these benefits could be summarised as financial savings, both in respect of direct and indirect staff costs, but also costs relating to the provision of infrastructure for an increased staff complement. In addition to this, the contract worker contingent can be utilised as a tested source for future staff recruiting. On the other hand, for the contract workers these contracts could be a valuable temporary source of income or income supplement. Thus, academic contract workers fulfil an essential role in different spheres of academic intercourse within the university tuition model and therefore their contribution needs to be managed diligently to optimally utilise this resource. In the School of Education at Unisa 125 contract workers are used to assist with the marking of assignments and examination scripts.

In spite of the expected valuable contribution of contract workers, a preliminary informal investigation into the use of contract workers revealed that many academic staff members complain about the system of contract workers, which is less efficient

than it could and should be. These complaints are rather directed at the system as such and not the underlying principles thereof. Taken into account the cost aspect of employing contract workers for academic tasks, the sound management of the whole process is essential to gain optimum value. An investigation was done to determine what specific problems lecturers experience and some of the staff expressed the view that the challenges experienced may perhaps result from inefficient management of the contract workers.

2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of this investigation are imbedded in the following questions: What are the challenges experienced by lecturers with the use of academic contract workers? How can the application of a managerial approach contribute to improve the use of contract workers at an ODL institution? An in-depth investigation of the use of contract workers may lead to improvement of the system through data feedback in the specific context.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Sound management procedures are important to ensure the success of the system of contract workers. Merk (2009:601) indicates the importance of strategies to recruit, train, supervise and even discipline the workers. Many issues need to be resolved to ensure that the workers fulfil their assigned jobs satisfactorily within the context of the workplace. The bottom line of the whole process of appointing contract workers is *proper management*. Cronjé, Du Toit & Motlatla (2004:122) define management as “*the process whereby human, financial, physical and information resources are employed in order to reach the goals of an organization*”.

Mary Parker Follett, being referred to as the “Prophet of Management” by the renowned management guru Peter Drucker (Follett Foundation 2011:Internet) in the early 1930s, coined a definition of management that is still frequently used today as the prevailing maxim of management. According to this definition, *management is getting things done through people and other resources* (All Business 2011: Internet).

This is precisely what Unisa is trying to achieve by employing contract workers. This less formal definition is expanded in the following manner: *Management entails those*

human activities aimed at achieving the set goals by utilising people and other resources. The task at hand includes utilising the services of staff and contract workers in achieving the university's set goal and objectives.

In management theory it is generally accepted that four integrated aspects are distinguished in the managerial task, namely planning, organising, leading and control (Allen 1974:44-45; Buzzle 2011:Internet; International Finance Corporation 2011:Internet; Lalwani 2010:Internet; Pakhare 2010:Internet). The main characteristics of these integrated functions of the managerial process are: "planning the goals and the resources to accomplish them, organising the resources and people, leading the people and lastly, controlling the resources and the activities of the people" (Cronjé *et al.* 2004:123; International Finance Corporation 2011:Internet). Besides these four management functions, Oosthuizen (2007:80) identifies motivation, communication and decision-making in successful management as separate auxiliary management functions, while other authors regard these as part of the leadership function. Whatever one's view on the classification of these functions, the main aim of management is to achieve the set goals of the organisation.

Planning forms the basis of all the tasks of management as it gives the activities direction by setting goals and planning how to reach these goals (De Beer 2002:108; Oosthuizen 2007:80). Planning should start by setting realistic objectives that are precise, clear and achievable. Čater and Pučko (2010:230) state that planning is worthless unless it is effectively implemented. Planning forms the basis of coordinating the task – "once goals have been clearly formulated and plans have been developed tasks and resources can be allocated so that everybody involved is able to contribute effectively to the realization of the goals" (Cronjé *et al.* 2004:142). Planning should not only focus on the formulation of objectives but should also attend to opportunities and threats to provide for alternative plans (Bateman & Snell 2007:16-18; De Beer 2002:115-116).

For the smooth running of the academic contract worker process, and to achieve the set goals, responsible lecturers need to develop managerial competency in their role as academics. This managerial competency can be described as a set of behaviour

patterns which an employee must display in order to effectively perform the tasks and functions of a designated role – in this case as an academic (Botha & Claassens 2010:78). Although the contract system is overseen by HR, the actual managing of the contract workers is delegated to the lecturer responsible for the teaching of a specific module. It is the responsibility of the lecturer to see that the system of using contract workers is properly planned, organised, leaded and controlled – a task that lecturers are not necessarily trained for, or even aware of.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The research entailed a qualitative approach for in-depth understanding and verification of the views of the lecturers in the various Departments of Education at Unisa, that are using contract workers to assist them with the marking of assignments and examination papers (Creswell & Garrett 2008:322; Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:9; Neuman 2006:151; Wilkins & Woodgate 2008:34). The selected research design was also exploratory in nature. The originality of the research lies in the fact that the researchers did not only investigate the views and perceptions of the participants in a setting that was not previously researched (using contract workers in an academic environment), but also interpreted the findings in terms of the application of managerial functions (refer to Table 1).

Qualitative research is based on a *naturalistic phenomenological philosophy* (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2006:466) and the nature thereof is interpretive, contextual, descriptive, inductive, explorative and holistic. The assumption in qualitative research is that knowledge is derived through people's descriptions of their views and as such the phenomenon can be interpreted and understood from the perspective of the participants (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:28-30). The research also took place in the natural environment of the participants at Unisa (Creswell 2003:181) which enabled the researchers to enter the world of the participants and obtain a rich understanding of the phenomenon as they experienced it (Babbie 2007:312; Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:30; Gay *et al.* 2006:466). The descriptive nature of the research is illustrated by the verbatim report of the responses of the participants which Creswell (2003:169) describes as *thick, rich descriptions*.

The research is inductive in nature as the data was gathered without preconceived notions. From the gathered data the researchers identified categories and themes and make sense of the data gathered by inductively examining them (Lincoln & Guba 1985:202; Struwig & Stead 2001:226). The research aimed at exploring the phenomenon to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation and to determine whether the study was viable (Babbie & Wagenaar 1989:80; Denscombe 2008:282). The ultimate aim of the qualitative enquiry was to obtain a holistic picture of lecturers' view of the phenomenon of contract workers (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:384). Different parts that make up the whole were examined in order to obtain a complete understanding of the whole.

To determine the view of lecturers with regard to the use of contract workers to relieve their workload, a purposive sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007:112) was employed in the investigation. An invitation to participate in focus group discussions was directed to all lecturers in the School of Education at Unisa who were using contract workers as they would be able to provide in-depth applicable information. Five lecturers were willing to participate in the research. The researchers adhered to the expected ethical measures in the execution of the study as suggested by Gay *et al.* (2006:73) as well as McMillan & Schumacher (2006:16).

The data from the focus groups was interpreted to identify themes and categories. An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method, which allows for the researcher's personal beliefs in the interpretation of the raw data, was used (Clarke 1999:533; Fade 2004:650; Smith & Osborne 2004:230). The process entailed: (1) analysing the data gained from the focus groups to identify statements relevant to the phenomenon under research; (2) grouping the statements according to themes, derived from various identified categories; (3) grouping the themes according to similarities or relationships in categories. After the analysis of the data, the findings were described to get a holistic picture of the research.

To ensure credibility the theoretical data was collected systematically. Credibility was enhanced by tape-recording the interviews and transcribing them accurately. During the analysis the categories were constantly compared with the original data and the

participants evaluated and confirmed the findings. To ensure inter-rater reliability (reliability when two or more researchers independently rate phenomena similar) the process of data analysis and interpretation was conducted independently by both researchers using the IPA method. The few differences that occurred were discussed and adapted.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The themes and categories that emerged from the discussion with the participants are summarised in Table 1. Five themes emerged from the raw data: aspects with regard to the appointment of contract workers; logistics pertaining the contract work; challenges for lecturers; workload of lecturers and feelings of contract workers. In the discussion of the findings attention was also given to the application of managerial functions to address the existing problems that lecturers experience.

The successful implementation of a contract worker system implies the proper understanding and application of managerial functions. Therefore, for the discussion on the findings the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions were linked to the various managerial functions as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and categories of using academic contract workers linked to managerial functions

Themes	Categories	Managerial function
Important aspects in the appointment of contract workers	The role of the lecturer in the appointment	Organising Leading
	Availability of contract workers	Planning Leading (H/R)
	Screening of contract workers	Leading (H/R)
Logistics pertaining the contract work	Turn-around time assignments	Organising Control
	Language issues	Organising Control

Themes	Categories	Managerial function
	Late finalising of contracts	Planning Leading (H/R)
	Consistency in the use of contract workers	Leading (H/R) Control
	Need for guidelines to streamline the process	Planning Organising
Challenges for lecturers	Necessity to check the work of contract workers	Control
	Change in student numbers	Planning
	New relationships	Leading
	Feedback to students	Control
Workload of lecturers	Hidden workload	Organising Leading
	Necessity to review workload during the year	Organising Leading
Feelings of contract workers	Negative feelings	Leading
	Initially very eager	Leading

5.1 IMPORTANT ASPECTS IN THE APPOINTMENT OF CONTRACT WORKERS

The theme *important aspects in the appointment of contract workers* overarches a number of categories derived from the research findings (see Table 1), which can be linked to the functions of planning and leadership. The three main human resources activities involve the attracting, retaining and developing of human resources (Leatherbarrow, Fletcher & Currie 2010:311). It is often found that these three activities are not meticulously dealt with when dealing with (temporary) contract workers. In very few cases a written job description is followed by a job specification that would help “finding the right worker for the job to be done”.

Recruiting and appointing workers is mainly a function of HR department where the functional management of the HR function sets the framework (Rees & French

2010:94-98). Within this framework, the lecturers involved should play an important role in the selection of suitable contract workers according to a job analysis. It is important to note that the success (or failure) of the system of contract workers rests on proper resources planning and the provision of practical guidelines to reach the goals of the university to ensure optimal functioning and success. Although the appointment of contract workers is an HR function, lecturers should provide input with regard to their needs and expectations. It seems as if lecturers are not participating sufficiently in the recruitment and appointment of contract workers. In this regard one lecturer reflected:

Markers whom I could choose and train was excellent, but markers who were selected by others (head of department) were a disaster. Lecturers acknowledge their need of contract workers, but also want ownership in the appointment of contract workers.

The task of marking assignments requires specific obligations from the contract workers in terms of logistics, availability and time management. Careful consideration of these factors is extremely important in the appointment of contract workers. In this regard another participant stated:

It is important to determine how far the contract worker stays from the University. Is she willing to bring marked assignments back or is she keeping the assignments back until there are enough to make a drive to the University worthwhile? It must also be kept in mind that most contract workers are also involved in some other fulltime career and might have time limitations.

The importance of screening the knowledge and skills of the contract worker was indicated by one of the lecturers.

The contract worker must have enough knowledge and insight to be able to mark. They must be able to interpret the answers to give constructive comments. To mark only according to a memo, causes a lot of problems. Some markers can bring work together ... others not. They sometimes give 50% with no comment.

The memo that is provided as a guide for the marking of assignments includes all the possibilities and markers should be able to select from the memo as well as contributing from their own knowledge and experience of the topic.

The tasks to be completed by the contract workers need to be properly planned and outlined to the worker. The head of department (HOD), in co-operation with HR should do so in consultation with the lecturers involved according to the specific needs in the module. Although the HOD has final responsibility for the appointment of contract workers, leadership should take place and could be delegated to a great extent to the relevant lecturers. These lecturers are in a better position, due to their knowledge of the content of the module that they are presenting, to indicate the need and the required knowledge and insight needed by the contract workers to successfully do the job. When a needs analysis is done, posts for contract workers can be advertised. After the screening of applicants' curriculum vitae's, interviews by HOD and lecturers involved, could contribute to the appointment of contract workers. Special planning and control is required for contract workers who do not stay close to the University to enable all role players to keep to the due dates of returning assignments to students.

5.2 LOGISTICS PERTAINING THE CONTRACT WORK

The theme *Logistics pertaining the contract work* overarches a number of categories derived from the research findings (see Table 1). Logistic challenges exist with regard to the turn-around time of the assignments, the language proficiency of the contract workers, the contracts that are not finalised in time and consistency in the use of contract workers. Participants stressed the need for guidelines to streamline the process of appointing contract workers. Cronjé *et al.* (2004:150) refer to plans that are concerned with the day-to-day performance of tasks and the allocation of resources to particular persons in accordance with particular programmes as short term plans and caution that many factors, like unrealistic objectives, environmental influences and financial constraints may disturb the planning process.

The process of using contract workers is not always running smoothly. One of the lecturers commented as follows:

The turn-around time of assignments is not feasible. In 'normal' circumstances, when everything runs smoothly the two to four weeks allowed are not sufficient.

The lecturer also indicated that lecturers are accused wrongly for being late with the return of assignment to students. She remarked:

Contract workers can take up to two months and then the responsible lecturer must take the fleck. All this adds to the workload of the lecturer which is not taken into account in the work allocation.

Assignments that are done in Afrikaans also contribute to a delay in the return of assignments to the students. Assignments are going out as a batch, with a cover page as control.

It is returned late (sometime two months later) and the Afrikaans assignments are not marked. Again, this is becoming the unexpected responsibility of the lecturer who has to mark the assignments.

In some cases some of the markers just put the assignments done in Afrikaans back in the pack without marking it and without indicating the fact to the controllers. Taking the challenges of an ODL institution with regard to the mailing of assignments in mind, the two to four weeks for the returning of assignments to students may not be feasible. Assignments are submitted by students to the Assignment Department which is responsible to record the reception of each assignment per student, and to distribute the assignments to the relevant academic departments. Lecturers receive the assignments and allocate them to contract workers - who are not on campus and have to drive to campus to collect the assignments. All of these factors imply a time consuming process and realistic planning, and commitment on the side of all the stakeholders. Controlling and aligning the different factors are crucial to reach the stated goals (Soltani, Lai & Phillips 2008:134).

The first step in control is to establish performance standards at strategic points in the activity process and, in doing so, control may also imply revised planning. Continuous collection of information and reporting on actual performance is necessary to determine and correct any deviations (Cronjé *et al.* 2004:265).

In some cases contracts are finalised too late (April/May). Understandably, contract workers are not willing to start with the marking before they are properly contracted for the work. This has a domino effect which results in lecturers submitting the marked assignments after the due date - in the case of semester courses the problem is aggravated. It also happens that students do not receive their assignments back before they sit for the examination and thus miss out on valuable feedback on the assignments which may have contributed to better preparation for the examination.

The worst scenario with regard to contracting and turn-around time was sketched with the following:

Markers are contracted for a certain period of time and it often happens that assignments are coming in after the contract expired. Only half of the assignments are in, while the assignments for practical teaching are only coming in during the next semester and the lecturer has to do all the work herself.

Consistency was regarded an important aspect in contracting. Contracts for the same tasks should not differ from one department to another and even from one lecturer to another. Furthermore, consistency in the use of experienced markers may speed up the process of marking and returning assignments timeously. It is indicated that:

There should be consistency in the use of markers for a specific module. Contract workers must stay with the same modules and lecturers... it contributes to competency.

Not only consistency in the use of experienced markers but also consistency in the process of distributing and collecting assignments is important. All departments should follow the same procedure.

Before any contract workers are paid the lecturer must cross check the forms... which again implies extra work for the lecturer.

The bottom line is that there need to be guidelines to streamline the process. Although not in place, lecturers realise the importance of managerial functions. One lecturer suggested:

There must be steps in place to check markers... an overarching responsible person.

Another lecturer remarked that:

Sometimes you hand assignments out in good faith and you are not able to trace the marker again. Lecturers need support in that regard...a place where they can report problems and give over the responsibility.

It is indicated that contract workers should understand their responsibilities and the importance of punctuality. The training of contract workers should be very specific and it should be taken into account that it is part of a lecturer's job description and be catered for in the work allocation.

It was suggested that contract workers also attend the discussion classes to contribute to their knowledge of the module. Although some lecturers were very positive about contract workers the following remarks also indicate some negativity about the use of contract workers: *some contract workers are from another country and struggle to understand English; marking was of a poor quality; inaccurate and inconsistent marking; lots of student complaints; comments below standard or virtually no feedback; marks sometimes differ greatly; slow to mark which delays the return of assignments; difficult to find competent and available contract workers; not much knowledge about the subject.*

The above extraction from the focus group interview clearly reflects a weakness in the proper managing of the issue of contract workers, starting at the very first step of the process, namely attracting and appointing the right workers. "Successful management involves the distribution of tasks, the allocation of resources to persons/ departments and giving the necessary authority to certain people to ensure that the tasks are in fact carried out. Decisions have to be taken with regard to the equipment, supplies, processes to follow and the people who must perform the task and this should be followed up with constant review" (Cronjé *et al.* 2004:158).

5.3 CHALLENGES FOR LECTURERS

Aspects like the necessity to check the work of contract workers, a change in student numbers, new relationships and feedback to students, causing problems to lecturers led to the overarching theme: *challenges for lecturers*. Quality control is an important aspect in tuition and lecturers should at least do spot checks on the marking done by contract workers. One of the lecturers commented:

I cannot check all the marking... Sometimes the contract worker will provide good comments on the student's work, but allocate a mark of 50%. This is unacceptable and adds a lot of work to me.

Poor work delivered by a contract worker does not only affect the student negatively but also reflects negatively on the lecturer. One lecturer remarked in this regard:

That not being competent on the side of the marker may contribute to a drop in standards... and it reflects on the lecturer.

One of the biggest concerns for lecturers is the variation in the estimated number of students for the following year and the final registration numbers of students. Budgeting for the appointment of contract workers is done at the end of the previous academic year and is calculated on an estimated number of students expected to enrol for a module. Thus, contract workers are contracted to mark a certain number of assignments and an increase in the number of students and thus in the number of assignments to be marked becomes the responsibility of and a burden for the lecturer.

In many cases lecturers do not have a say in the appointment of contract workers and existing contract workers are replaced due to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) requirements. The implication is that new contract workers need to be recruited, appointed and trained, which is a time consuming process and a new relationship has to be built. One of the lecturers indicated that she finds it very difficult if she has no say in the appointment of the contract worker. *I don't know the person, don't know the quality of her work... there is no rapport.*

Botha and Claassens (2010:78) refer to unique challenges of the business environment that may require not only generic, but also inspirational and trans-

formational leadership competencies. In their tasks business leaders in South Africa are “confronted with numerous challenges, such as globalisation, cultural diversity, black economic empowerment and transformation” (Botha & Claassens 2010:78); these are clearly challenges experienced by lecturers at Unisa as well. It is often a problem that there is a discrepancy between the feedback of lecturers and contract workers to students, which place some of the students in a negative position. Lecturers have to ensure that all students receive proper feedback on their assignments and are not negatively affected because the student’s assignment is marked by an incompetent contract worker. These discrepancies could be minimised by functional leadership and control. Čater and Pučko (2010:232) found in their study that managers often understand the importance of planning and organising activities, while the same cannot be said for leadership and controlling activities.

5.4 WORKLOAD OF LECTURERS

According to Cronjé *et al.* (2004:159) organising fulfils an important role in dividing the total workload into activities that can comfortably be performed by an individual or group and also promotes the productive deployment and utilisation of resources. The appointment of contract workers aims at relieving lecturers’ workload, though the focus group interviews indicated that this goal was not achieved. The theme *workload of lecturers* overarches a number of categories derived from the research findings (see Table 1). Although contract workers are appointed to give relieve to lecturers from time consuming repetitive marking work, it seems as if the use of contract workers implies a hidden extra workload. One of the lecturers indicated that she has *no say in the training of the marker... this result in improper marking and I have to remark the work.*

There is clearly a need to revise the allocation of contract workers once registration is completed. It more than often happens that the estimated number of enrolments for a specific module is off target and that more students enrol than have been catered for by the initial appointment of contract workers. The result of this discrepancy between the estimated and actual number of students is an increase in the workload of the lecturer. One of the lecturers indicated that her work allocation includes the marking

of 400 assignments for a specific module, though 1200 students enrolled. A marker was allocated to support her with the job, but *she did not bring her side and I had to take up the responsibility. These are extras which are not taken into account in the work allocation.*

The lecturers indicated a burden of too heavy a workload. *More people need to be appointed... it is necessary to review the workload during the year.* The perception exist that: *Nobody cares about your well-being. Time frames set by the University do not cater for all the work... more responsibility than lecturers can handle. People are over exploited... too many students not catered for.* One also remarked: *Irrespective of all the negative comments, I must say if we did not have them, we all would have been in Tara [a hospital in Johannesburg for psychiatric patients].*

5.5 FEELINGS OF CONTRACT WORKERS

Lecturers were prompt to reflect on their perception of the feelings of the contract workers. Negative feelings and a change in the attitude of the contract workers were indicated by the lecturers. *The fact that the contracts are not in place causes much negativity amongst the contract workers.* One of the lecturers indicated that the markers were initially very eager to start with the work, but she did not *foresee the workload and the administration. When tired she stopped and it became my responsibility.*

Williams (2008:248) found in her study that short term employment has a negative influence on the commitment and attitude of employees working under contract. Lecturers need to attend to this concern of contract workers. Motivation is an important aspect of leadership (Cronjé 2004:174) and motivating contract workers is an integral part of task of the responsible lecturer.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Strategic planning is essential for the successful application of a contract system and implies the planning of activities that are vital for the functioning of the company (Češnovar 2006:227,241). The managerial functions planning, organising, leading and control are intimately linked. Planning without organising, leadership and control

is pointless and control without planning is not possible (Cronjé *et al.* 2004:262). The successful use of a contract system to support lecturers in the marking of assignments needs sound application and synchronisation of the various managerial functions. Not only is the selection, appointment and induction of duly qualified contract workers essential, but they also need clear guidelines for doing the job and the output should be submitted to quality control. Leadership, which is not only the task of Human Resources, but also that of the lecturer involved, plays an important role in keeping the contract workers motivated and enthusiastic in their work.

From the research results it seems as if the selection and appointment of contract workers who are willing, able and qualified to accept the responsibilities of the task, as well as the delay in the processing of the contracts, are the most important aspects contributing to the frustration of the responsible lecturers. Furthermore, that the contract workers involved are not all capable to adhere to the time limitations of the marking of assignments and do not have fluency in the official languages required by Unisa. These are factors contributing to dissatisfaction on the side of the lecturers and cause unexpected increases in their workload.

A series of issues for further research were outlined from the problems identified. These include the need to expedite the finalising of contracts and contracting people for more than one year to gain continuity; the provision of a clear job description to contract workers, taking into consideration the specific requirements of each department; generic guidelines not only for the appointment of contract workers, but also to outline the expectations and responsibilities of contract workers.

To obtain optimal value from the contract worker system in academic departments, total quality control should be in place. The business process regarding contract workers should be continuously improved (Chang 2010:44). This view is supported by Wu and Fang (2010:267) by stressing that the capacity for continuous change and improvement is particularly important in complex and turbulent environments where environments and competitive situations are changing rapidly and unpredictably. It may even be needed for survival (Turban, Rainer & Potter 2003:157). It is not only the responsibility of the lecturers but all departments involved having clear bench

marks and quality control measures to ensure the success of utilising the services of contract workers.

Inevitably, this study has limitations as it is based on a small sample of lecturers from only three departments at Unisa. Though, the aim of the study was not to generalise findings but to take an in-depth look at problems experienced by lecturers with regard to the system of using contract workers. Furthermore, the research aimed to determine whether the problems were related to the inefficient application of managerial functions. This seems evident from the results of the research. It is recommended that this study is followed by guidelines for a managerial approach to “getting results through the utilisation of contract workers”.

REFERENCES

- ALL BUSINESS.** 2011. Mastering “the Art of Getting Things Done Through People”. [Internet: <http://www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/workforce-management/12023-1.html>; downloaded on 2011-03-15.]
- ALLEN LA.** 1974. *Convoc: The Louis A Allen common vocabulary of professional management.* 4th ed. Palo Alto: Louis A Allen Associates.
- BABBIE E.** 2007. *The practice of social research.* Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.
- BABBIE E & WAGENAAR TC.** 1989. *Practicing Social Research.* 5th ed. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.
- BATEMAN TS & SNELL S.** 2007. *Management: Leading and Collaborating in a Competitive World.* Burr Ridge, Ill: McGraw-Hill.
- BOTHA S & CLAASSENS M.** 2010. Leadership competencies: the contribution of the bachelor in management and leadership (BML) to the development of leaders at First National Bank, South Africa. *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 9(10):77- 87, October.
- BUZZLE.** 2011. Management Concepts – The Four Functions of Management. (Internet: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/management-concepts-the-four-functions-of-management.html>; downloaded on 2011-03-12.)

ČATER T & PUČKO D. 2010. Factors of effective strategy implementation: Empirical evidence from Slovenian business practice. *Journal for East European Management Studies*, 15(3):207-236.

ČEŠNOVAR T. 2006. The impact of strategic management on business outcomes – Empirical research. *Journal for East European Management Studies*, 3:227-243.

CHANG J. 2010. Business Process Management Systems Strategy and Implementation. Burr Ridge, Ill: McGraw-Hill.

CLARKE A. 1999. Qualitative research: data analysis techniques. *Professional Nurse*, 14(8):531-533.

CONWAY N & BRINER RB. 2002. Full-Time versus part-time employees: understanding the links between work status, the psychological contract, and attitudes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 61, 279–301.

CRESWELL JW. 2003. Research design qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach. California: Sage.

CRESWELL JW & GARRETT AL. 2008. The “movement” of mixed methods research and the role of educators. *South African Journal of Education*, 28(3):321-333.

CRESWELL JW & PLANO CLARK VL. 2007. Designing and conducting mixed methods research. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

CRONJÉ GJ de J, DU TOIT GS & MOTLATLA MDC. 2004. Introduction to Business Management. 6th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DE BEER AA. 2002. The general management function. In LE ROUX EE, DE BEER AA, FERREIRA EJ, HÜBNER CP, JACOBS H, KRITZINGER AAC, LABUSCHAGNE M, STAPELBERG JE & VENTER CH (eds). *Business Management*. 2nd ed. Sandton: Heinemann. pp. 107-138.

DENSCOMBE M. 2008. Communities of practice: A research paradigm for the mixed methods approach. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 2(3):270-283.

DENZIN NK & LINCOLN YS. 2005. The discipline and practice in qualitative research. In DENZIN NK & LINCOLN YS (eds.). *The landscape of qualitative research: theories and issues*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- FADE S.** 2004. Using IPA for public health nutrition and dietetic research. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 63:647-653.
- FERNDALE E, PAAUWE J & HOEKSEMA L.** 2009. In-sourcing HR: Shared service centres in the Netherlands. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(3):544-561.
- FOLLETT FOUNDATION.** 2011. Mary Parker Follett. [Internet <http://www.follettfoundation.org/mpf.htm>; downloaded on 2011-03-12.]
- GAY LR, MILLS, GE & AIRASIAN P.** 2006. *Educational Research. Competencies for Analysis and Applications*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- INTERNATIONAL FINANCE CORPORATION.** 2011. Management Functions. [Internet: [http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/enviro.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/p_StakeholderEngagement_PartOne_Management/\\$FILE/PartOne_ManagementFunctions.pdf](http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/enviro.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/p_StakeholderEngagement_PartOne_Management/$FILE/PartOne_ManagementFunctions.pdf); downloaded on 2011-03-12.]
- LALWANI P.** 2010. Functions of management. [Internet: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/functions-of-management.html>; downloaded on 2011-03-12.]
- LEATHERBARROW C, JANET FLETCHER J & CURRIE D.** 2010. *Introduction to Human Resource Management: a guide to HR in practice*. Burr Ridge, Ill: McGraw-Hill.
- LINCOLN YS & GUBA EG.** 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage.
- MARX AE.** 2006. Human resources management. In NIEMAN G & BENNETT A (eds). *Business Management*. 2nd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. pp. 179-201.
- MCMILLAN JH & SCHUMACHER S.** 2006. *Research in Education. Evidence-based Inquiry*. 6th ed. New York: Pearson.
- MERK J.** 2009. Jumping Scale and Bridging Space in the Era of Corporate Social Responsibility: cross-border labour struggles in the global garment industry. *Third World Quarterly*, 30(3):599-615.
- NEUMAN WL.** 2006. *Social Research Methods. A Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 6th ed. New York: Pearson.
- OOSTHUIZEN TFJ.** 2007. General management and leadership. In NIEMAN G & BENNETT A (eds). *Business management for accounting students*. (Abridged version of 2nd ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik. pp. 80-104.

PAKHARE J. 2010. Management concepts – the four functions of management. [Internet: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/management-concepts-the-four-functions-of-management.html>; downloaded 2010-03-12]

REES G & FRENCH R. 2010. Leading, Managing and Developing People. Burr Ridge, Ill: McGraw-Hill.

SMITH JA & OSBORNE M. 2004. Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In Breakwell GM (ed). Doing Social Psychology Research. London: The British Psychological Society and Blackwell. pp. 225-240.

SOLTANI E, LAI P-C & PHILLIPS P. 2008. A new look at factors influencing total quality management failure: work process control or workforce control? *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 23(1-2):125-142.

STRUWIG FW & STEAD GB. 2001. Planning, designing and reporting research. Cape Town: Pearson Education.

TURBAN E, RAINER R & POTTER R. 2003. Introduction to Information Technology. New York: Wiley.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA. 2011. Unisa's Institutional Information and Analysis Portal. [Internet: <http://heda.unisa.ac.za/indicatordashboard/>; downloaded 2011-06-11.]

WILKINS K & WOODGATE R. 2008. Designing a mixed methods study in pediatric oncology nursing research. *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing*, 25(1):34-43.

WILLIAMS G. 2008. Managing by insecurity: work and managerial control under outsourcing. *Competition & Change*, 12(3): 245-261, September.

WU C-H & Fang K. 2010. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*. 22(2):261-276