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Skills development through structured qualifications: learnerships and apprenticeships

In this section we consider how skills development is offered for young people through structured qualifications that combine theory and workplace learning: apprenticeships and learnerships. **GLENDA KRUSS** and **MARIETTE VISSER** show a technique that is useful to track the progress of individuals through education and training, then into the workplace. **ANGELIQUE WILDSCHUT** uses the technique to describe the ways in which learnerships equip young people to enter the labour market. **GENEVIEVE HAUPT** focuses on how young people are not selecting an apprenticeship as a first choice option. **JOAN ROODT** shows a blockage in the system of artisanal trade tests. Lastly, **DEAN JANSE VAN RENSBURG** describes the ways in which training opportunities are concentrated in the main metropolitan areas and are not accessible enough to those who are most vulnerable.

New direction and transitions in skills development systems

How can we measure whether the government has met the set targets for training more people? In this article **MARIETTE VISSER** and **GLENDA KRUSS** outline a new technique that could identify the directions and paths individual participants follow during learnership and apprenticeship training, how to plot those individuals' journeys through the system to be able to improve it, and the implications this has for policy formulation.

The most common method of judging how well learners have performed is based on group performance or census-like counts. The impact of the National Skills Development Strategies (NSDS) has typically been measured by the number of enrolments, the number that complete a qualification and the number that enter employment.

Such indicators assume a linear progression into and through a learning programme, and then a transition to the labour market. But research globally suggests that often individual transitions are more complex and take the forms of 'crazy paving' or 'zig-zag' trajectories.

Case studies in South Africa suggest that these complex trajectories, or journeys, are more likely for those who are most economically and socially vulnerable.

If we focus on the typical measurements of total numbers only, it will provide us with limited insight into the success and efficiency of the journeys of individuals through the training system, and also limit our ability to identify areas where we could intervene to improve individual development.

Frameworks that provide more valid and reliable assessments of the impact of education are those that follow the individual's movements and transitions from education to training and into either employment or unemployment. This article outlines a technique we developed in the South African context to identify and represent the transitions and trajectories of individual learnership and apprenticeship participants, allowing us to draw out more nuanced policy implications.

THE PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK

This technique drew from literature on pathways studies that provide a systematic methodology and framework for tracing individuals into, through and out of vocational education and training and skills development systems.

We attempted to identify individual 'trajectories' to reflect the ways in which young people make simple or more complex sequences of 'transitions' to actually 'navigate' the learnership and apprenticeship pathway systems.

The frequencies of individual trajectories indicate the common patterns of movement among groups of participants. For example, if the ideal is that an individual will finish school at NQF level 4, then proceed to a vocational or occupation-related learnership at a higher NQF level and then proceed to the workplace, how does this match with the actual experience of young people in real life; distinguished by race, gender, class or spatial location?

RESEARCH METHODS

The challenge was to find a mechanism to measure complex patterns of transition in a short telephonic survey interview. Here the work

of Robinson (2004) suggested a simple but effective technique, initially developed as a means of representing student progression through a higher education degree programme.

Essentially, the technique provides a way of mapping individual patterns of enrolment, progress and completion by coding a student's status at the beginning and end of each year. The individual's progression trajectory over the course of the degree programme can then be represented as a series of codes. It is possible to tally the number of individuals in the university system with the same code series — and hence obtain a nuanced analysis of a finite but large number of individual trajectories through a pathway system.

Tracking progress through a university degree is far simpler than tracking transitions from a learnership or apprenticeship programme to various forms of work, further study or unemployment. The technique was adapted for our purposes and used to structure a survey instrument using a custom-designed, computer-assisted telephonic interviewing (CATI) instrument.

In both the learnership and the apprenticeship CATI surveys, the interviewers probed participants to think retrospectively to establish the chain of individual outcomes from the time of completing the learnership to their current labour market status, or from the time of leaving school until entering the apprenticeship. The starting point and time lapse between transitions varied for each individual participant.

The only common point was the end point — the period in which the survey was conducted in 2010. We then used the technique to analyse the data generated to reflect patterns of individual trajectories through the learnership and apprenticeship pathways.

Figure 1 provides a visualised representation of the concept of a trajectory with its transitions, based on the choice to enter an apprenticeship programme.

The matrix of five possible options for an individual entering into an apprenticeship after leaving school were: entered apprenticeship, worked, studied, worked and studied, and not worked and not studied.

Each transition code for each respondent was first captured separately and then, during data analysis, concatenated to form a trajectory code with inherent meaning. So, for example, an individual may have a 'navigation' code of A — which means they entered the apprenticeship as their first transition after leaving school. An example of a more complex trajectory with multiple navigations is a code of USUWUA, indicating someone who was unemployed, studied, unemployed, worked, again unemployed and then decided to enter an apprenticeship.
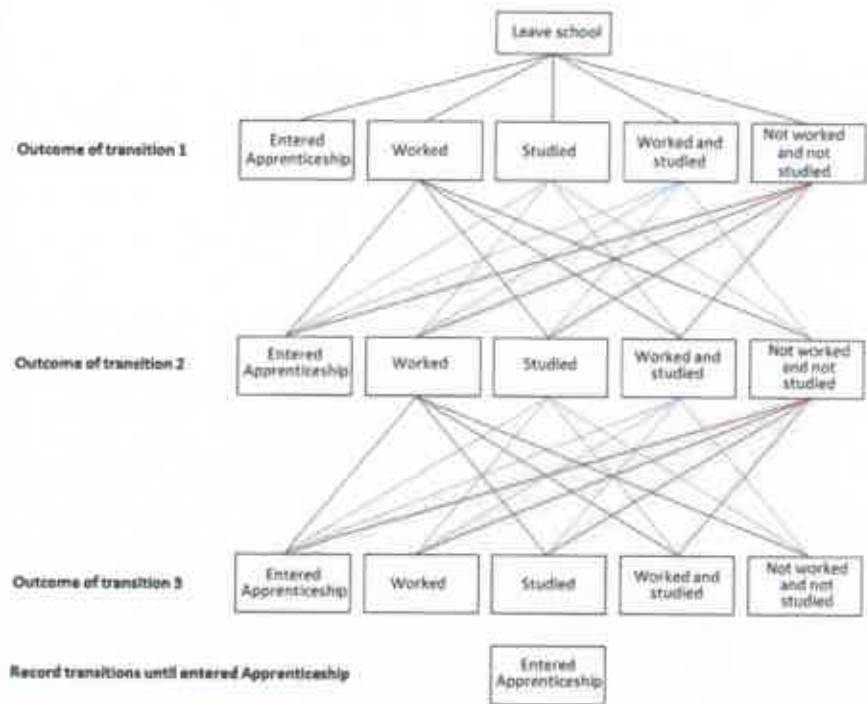
Our analysis could investigate how many

Figure 1: Conceptual representation of an apprenticeship trajectory

transitions were typical before entry into a programme, or after completing the programme, before a transition to employment. Such indicators provide a measure of the 'fit' between a qualification and the labour market. It was also possible to investigate the frequencies of each trajectory and disaggregate these in terms of biographical and other characteristics of participants, or in terms of sectoral distributions. For instance, what is the racial, gender and socioeconomic profile of those who are more likely to have simple or complex trajectories, or to study further, or to access the labour market? In which SETAs are participants more likely to access the labour market or to remain unemployed?

Such analyses potentially provide important information for strategically targeting funding and interventions within a specific SETA or across a pathway system.

CONCLUSION

The pathway technique is simple, accurate, practical and applicable to making informed decisions in the skills development environment. Information on transitions and trajectories can assist authorities such as the Department of Labour, Department of Higher Education and Training and the SETAs in planning and policy development.

►► The set of articles on learnership and apprenticeship pathway systems that follow this article will illustrate the veracity of the technique, and the policy insights that such analyses make possible. ◄◄

This article was drawn from two reports commissioned by commissioned by the Departments of Labour/Higher Education and Training. Both reports are available on www.hsrc.ac.za:

A Technical Report on Learnership and Apprenticeship Population Databases in South Africa: Patterns and Shifts in Skills Formation, by Wildschut, A; Kruss, G; Janse van Rensburg, D; Haupt; and Visser, M; 2012.

Learnerships and Apprenticeships Survey 2010 Technical Report: Identifying Transitions and Trajectories through the Learnership and Apprenticeship Systems, by Janse van Rensburg, D; Visser, M; Wildschut, A; Roodt, J; and Kruss, G; 2012.

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Strategies to skill the nation: Review of government's skills development strategy

The size and shape of FET colleges

Hate thy neighbour – xenophobia rages on