



Sandra Burmeister ... globalisation has accelerated skills transfer across national borders and limited the ability of countries to manage their economies independent of international norms.

Poaching rife at all skills levels

POACHING of staff is a major contributor to labour turnover in SA and around the globe, says Dr Albert Wöcke, senior lecturer at the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

"Poaching of South Africans by international organisations is bigger than ever, with the manufacturing, mining, health and education sectors hardest hit.

"As long as skills remain in demand, poaching is unlikely to let up as a means of acquiring talented employees. In fact, all indications are that it will become far more aggressive."

He says to date South African organisations have focused largely on the internal management of poaching, but as it accelerates, companies will have to start looking at external measures to reduce it, including legal action to protect intellectual property.

"Restraints of trade aren't necessarily the answer in the South African context because they seldom have the desired effect. They're hugely clumsy and because they're so costly to implement, usually aren't worth the paper they're written on."

He says there is little companies can do to stop poaching entirely, but there are ways to make it more difficult to be targeted.

"Try to identify which companies are poaching you. If you lose more than two employees to the same company within a year you

must know they're raiding your skills. Market yourself internally and externally as an employer of choice."

Companies use several recruitment or headhunting firms and different middlemen to disguise the fact that they're raiding the opposition, Wöcke says.

"Many organisations in the US respond by counterraidering. But it may be more appropriate in SA for organisations to get together and look at industry-wide responses to the problem.

"People are being poached because of skills shortages; therefore we need to over-develop those skills, to exceed demand with supply. We're beautifully set up to do that and can use the Setas to drive the development of those critical skills."

He says cross-industry poaching is more complex.

"For instance, the financial services sector is the biggest recruiter of engineers. The short-term solution is to import engineers; because they're employed on a short-term contract they'll remain where they're needed.

"At the same time, employers need to communicate to universities about the type of skills they need. Universities can respond to labour-market demands quite quickly. You don't need a civil engineer to work in a bank. Instead, the right mix of skills in a BCom could give you what you need."

