

STAFFING NEEDS A FLEXIBLE APPROACH

BUSINESSES must implement flexible staffing practices if they want to flourish in today's increasingly competitive market.

"No business can hope to thrive if it is expected to staff up to meet peak demand," says Sandra Burmeister, CEO of executive search firm Landelahni Business Leaders. "Financial markets make provision for cyclical growth in every industry, and it follows that organisations should look to staff accordingly."

No company can successfully build expertise in every area, so they should look to outsource the staff recruitment processes, she says. "By focusing on their core expertise, external service providers can generate economies of scale, and lower costs."

Workers no longer devote their lives to one company, so shorter tenures have become the norm. A global shortage of skilled professions has also led to skills mobility. And rapidly changing technologies mean skills become obsolete faster, which all raise the staff turnover.

"Temporary employment services (TES) providers are the perfect intermediary to balance supply and demand," says Burmeister. "The sophistication of the TES sector is generally underestimated. TES providers are a strategic partner to business. Professional private employment agencies provide benefits, skills development, bridging employment and labour force management. They have the expertise and competence to sup-

port business to achieve the flexibility of labour resource it requires."

SA's labour department says combined fixed-term contracts and temporary staff grew as a proportion of total employment from 11,4% in 2003 to 16,8% in 2007. Permanent positions showed a small decrease from 69,9% to 65,1% between 2003 and 2007.

"These figures show the perception that SA is overusing flexible labour is untrue," says Burmeister. SA has significantly more people in permanent positions than other developing countries, and the size of its temporary workforce — at 16,8% — is more aligned with the developed economies of Britain, Germany and France.

However, continued growth and significant investment in infrastructure development projects, which are temporary or project-based, will result in a further increase in temporary employment.

Flexibility can benefit both the individual and the company, and flexible labour costs can be a competitive differentiator. Locally, 15% of all temporary staff become permanent within a year, creating a bridge that equips new entrants to the market with the skills required for permanent employment.

"The biggest leadership challenge for the next 10 years is related to workforce talent. We should ensure the atypical workforce is given the same protection as permanent employees," she says.

