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## Black mining directorships rocket, research study finds

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Black representation on the boards of mining houses has shot up from 0,05% to 37%, since 2001, Landelahni Business Leaders reported on Thursday.

Landelahni Business Leaders is an executive search company in the Landelahni group.

"This represents a significant shift since the Mining Charter was formulated in October 2002," Landelahni Group CEO Sandra Burmeister said.

However, at other levels, mining-industry representation trailed the average across all industries, she said. The research, covering 80% of the mining sector, was undertaken to provide insight into the progress made in employment equity at mining industry operational and corporate levels and to provide guidelines for companies in developing employment-equity strategies in line with the requirements of the Mining Charter. While the number of non-engineering black and white executive directors in the mining industry grew significantly between 2001 and 2004, the ratio between black and white remained static at around 13%.

Black representation in positions from executive to mid-management level grew from 24%, in 2003, to 29% in 2005. At corporate head office and at mining operational level, more than 80% of blacks were in support functions, such as human resources, shared services, finance and communications.

At operational level, the research indicates that out of 100 shafts, there were 11 black mine managers, compared to two in 2001.

The research indicated that, to date, the mining industry had been slower than other sectors to put processes in place to meet transformation requirements.

However, Burmeister said that the significant board transformation that had occurred was a step in the right direction.

"It is bound to accelerate the process across the rest of the organisation," she said.

Meanwhile, Burmeister said that the downward trend in engineering graduates from tertiary institutions since 1998, including those with mining-specific degrees, remained worrying. "There has been a 30% increase in engineering enrolments, but only 5% of first-year students actually graduate as engineers.

The reasons include funding problems due to a decline in the available bursaries as well as the lack of effective bridging programmes to assist students who have not necessarily had a strong mathematics and science background.

“At the same time, while 1 000 learnerships a year have been targeted by the Mining Qualifications Authority, as at August 2004, only 686 had been taken up, and only 40 had been completed,” she said, adding that the technical-skills shortage would be compounded over the next 10 years if such a reduction in numbers was allowed to continue.

More encouraging was the increase in Engineering Council registrations across all disciplines, indicating that the companies are putting employees through certification processes, she said.

The two main reasons cited for not meeting industry sector employment-equity targets were the shortage of skills in the industry and the competition for skills.

“Owing to the industrywide skills shortage and lack of career growth opportunities, a high level of career-mobility exists among black mining professionals,” said Burmeister.

“Mining is perceived as a shrinking industry and this, combined with the length of stay of experienced people, does not make mining an attractive option for ambitious, high-powered people, except at a black economic-empowerment shareholding level.

Add to this the fact that most black recruits exit from the industry in 18 months.” The main challenges facing the mining industry were identified as the development of short-, medium- and long-term recruitment, retention and management develop strategies.

“Not enough is being done to develop skills in the sector, and this will compound the skills shortage in the medium to long term. If we don't have enough graduates, we will have to increase skills imports to meet future needs.”

A solid graduate programme that goes beyond merely providing bursaries to black candidates is required. Graduate development programmes need to focus on ensuring that each graduate has the support, guidance, career planning, mentoring and coaching necessary to ensure extended employment with the company. And, once they are employed, a fast-track programme for black candidates with management potential is needed so they can achieve executive status within the company, particularly on the operational side.

“Beyond that,” said Burmeister, “external recruitment strategies need to be developed to both address the skills shortage and ensure that senior positions are occupied by black people.

Often potential candidates exist at executive and senior-management level in other industries, with transferable skills.”