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SA vulnerable in skills arena

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Johannesburg - Globally, employers have been forced to recognise that the war for talent is over, and talent has won.

This is the view of Landelahni Business Leaders, which released its fourth Mining Survey on Tuesday.

"The demand for skills and the transferability of skills across industries is only going to increase," said Landelahni CEO Sandra Burmeister.

This is primarily due to the massive capital expenditure taking place in mining, manufacturing and infrastructure.

Emerging markets are projecting infrastructure spend of \$21.7 trillion over the ten years between 2008 and 2018.

As a result of infrastructure investment locally, the last two years has seen enormous growth in employment in the construction (4% to 8%) and manufacturing (15% to 17,8%) industries.

Mining sector employment has also grown from 3.6% of total employment in 2005 to 5.4% of total employment in 2007.

"The shortage of skills - particularly of engineers - in the mining industry calls for a more innovative approach when recruiting at all levels in the organisation," Burmeister said.

According to the survey, a total of 35 511 graduates moved into the industry across all disciplines between 1998 and 2006 while a total of 14 234 professional engineers were registered across all disciplines in South Africa, which is 1 100 less than those registered ten years ago.

This means the mining industry has been competing for scarce skills with infrastructure, manufacturing and other industries, said Burmeister.

What is more, the South African mining industry is competing for mining skills in a global resourcing market.

Burmeister said global resourcing has become critical to the success of the local mining industry, given the spread of exploration and mining activities across globe.

"Many mining houses have international operations, and can make use of management exchanges and offshore projects to accelerate skills development. Smart strategies for resourcing include pooling scarce resources across continents and sharing skills across mines," she said.

But she warned that in the current environment where there was a shortage of skills in the mining industry across the globe, skills development has become much more than a scorecard measure; it has become an economic imperative.

- I-Net Bridge

