

SAPICS SCNext Student Conference equips students for supply chain success

Supply chain professionals are in increasing demand across a number of industries. The importance of supply chain expertise to a variety of fields was recently acknowledged at the second annual SAPICS SCNext Student Conference held on 20 March 2015 in Midrand. The conference carried the same theme as the SAPICS 2015 annual conference being held in Sun City from 31 May – 2 June: The Pulse of Africa's Supply Chains. (Info: www.sapics.org.za)

"Logistics historically only referred to a specific area in the supply chain. Therefore, I would rather appoint a Supply Chain Professional to run my business who understands the complexities of the whole supply chain and the interactions between the different elements within Supply Chain Management (SCM)", said guest speaker Hekkie van der Westhuizen (CSCP), General Manager of Dairypack. "I would much rather employ someone with a SCM qualification through a quality organisation like Sapics (Apics), because I know that this person should be well equipped to add value to my supply chain."

The attendance of students from a wide variety of learning paths at this year's conference, hosted by SAPICS, also demonstrated a marked upswing in interest in SCM as a career. Students came from the Universities of Johannesburg and Pretoria, Tshwane University of Technology, Vaal University of Technology and the Institute of Marketing Management.

The conference was also attended by various professionals offering to invest time mentoring students. An international organisation represented in this country by SAPICS, SCNext helps to recruit and equip students for the working world, an important component of which is pairing students with SCM professionals in order to facilitate a true transfer of skills and experience.

"It is our vision to establish student societies at campuses across the country, organising both formal and informal gatherings where SAPICS mentors will address students on a variety of topics, as we saw at this year's conference," says Ayanda Khumalo, SAPICS Relationship Manager and President of SCNext South Africa.

This year, speakers varied from Fortunate Mboweni from Bidvest Panalpina Logistics, who was the first African to win the Young Freight Forwarder of the Year competition, to supply chain veteran Mark Cleeve-Edwards from Barloworld Logistics who presented results from the most recent Supply Chain Foresight survey.

This year's survey found that people are more stressed by the pace of change than the actual change itself. "Entrants into the SCM market must understand that they will need to be very good at adapting to change fast if they are to stay

ahead of the game,” says Khumalo. “The worst thing you can do for your SCM career is to become numb to change. You should always anticipate and get yourself ready for change before it even happens.”

Keeping things ‘real’ was SAPICS Director and Head of Long Term Plan Development and Logistics at Transnet Rail Engineering, Kea Mpane, who gave delegates a reality check about not getting in over their heads with debt once they start work.

Practical input came from Tongaat Hulett Starch’s Onicca Mailula who used the example of planning a braai to discuss the various roles and responsibilities, bringing clarity to some of the confusion some people experience with regards to supply chain definitions.

Another lively discussion emerged from a presentation by Juanita Vorster, Strategist and Owner of At That Point PR, who challenged delegates regarding their social media presence and how it can impact their careers.

“At SCNext, we realise the importance of employers and industry professionals investing time and effort in the development of young minds before they start working – for the good of their own organisations,” says Khumalo, explaining the variety of speakers and topics featured at this year’s conference.

“As a global initiative that aims to link SCM students with mentors and organisations, we believe in giving students platforms to practice their learnings while still studying. This is proven to give them a head start in making a difference in the world through supply chain practices, to the benefit of the organisations they serve.”