

Wholesale&Retail

LEADERSHIP CHAIR

Collaboration opens the window to a world of opportunities



A Model for an On-campus Retail Store for Work-integrated Learning A SUMMARY

A key feature of the government's National Development Plan, 2030, is that young people who graduate from South Africa's universities and colleges should have the skills and knowledge to meet the present and future needs of the economy and society.

INTRODUCTION

The South African education system following the school-leaving certificate has, for the most part, separated academic, theoretical learning from practical, workplace learning. This has resulted in South African youth entering the job market with academic qualifications but no practical work experience. The high level of graduate unemployment is an indication that universities and colleges do not produce graduates with the right skills who are able to meet the needs of society and industry. Universities produce the wrong type of graduates who are not of high quality and not suited to specialized positions. Enhancing the employability of the South African youth is therefore a major priority.

This study grew out of the need to develop a model to guide the development and implementation of an on-campus retail store to improve the work-integrated learning of students studying for the Retail Business Management diploma. Such a store would be used as a centre where students could gain the work experience required for their retail qualification and to improve their successful employability by the retail industry. The work experience students would gain from working at the on-campus retail store would assist them to obtain work more easily and to be of greater value to their employers than employees who have not had work experience.

The key question is: "How can work-integrated learning bridge the gap between practical work experience and academia, and ensure that students at a retail store situated on an academic campus are able to gain workplace experience?" Furthermore, what type of model would best suit such a store, and how should it be implemented to be most effective, in the shortest possible time?

METHODOLOGY

This study commenced with a comprehensive literature survey on WIL, with emphasis on approaches to workplace experience, and what is required by the retail industry and the education programmes. The target group for the study were twelve retail lecturers, five major retailers who are knowledgeable experts from retail chains, three experts in work-integrated learning and two retail experts.

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. This combination of structured and unstructured interviews allowed respondents to address pre-determined questions in a systematic and consistent manner, and still have the opportunity to discuss matters beyond the questions, and give varied and detailed responses. All respondents were also given a short questionnaire to complete and the retail lecturers were asked to link the workplace activities to the subjects they teach.

Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and then checked for availability and completion. Open coding was used to organise the data into categories. This process of interpreting data involves linking a word or phrase, or breaking down words or phrases, into themes or concepts to form a meaningful finding. When similar codes are found throughout the transcripts, a strong case for the credibility of the research findings can be made.

DEFINITION OF WIL

According to the World Association for Co-operative Education, work-integrated learning (WIL) is a term given to any university, college or other academic programme that integrates theoretical learning with the world of work. Students are given the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge gained in their academic studies and experience the responsibilities of the world of work. Bibby argues that theoretical learning acquired through traditional programmes could be difficult to apply in the workplace. The need for a knowledge-in-practice type of learning is essential. Patrick, Peach and Pocknee refer to WIL as an umbrella term used for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum. They emphasize that WIL is about more than just placements, and this is reflected in the broad range of approaches adopted, including placements, project work, simulations and virtual WIL.

Blom explains and summarizes nineteen types, terms and definitions related to WIL that often cause debate and confusion. The Council for Higher Education (CHE) gives the most basic definition for WIL, namely, “an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces”, which definition was adopted for this study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study set out to answer the question of how WIL, through an on-campus retail store, can bridge the gap between practical work experience and academia, and ensure that students participating in the retail store gain workplace experience. The study therefore aimed to develop:

- a workplace experience model for retail students to gain experience in a retail store on campus; and
- a model for the most effective and fastest establishment, management and running of such a store.

LITERATURE

Student retailing

A student-run business on an academic campus is not a new concept. The Universities of Colorado, Maryland and Massachusetts all give students the opportunity to run businesses and thereby get workplace learning. Another example, at a mid-sized US university, requires students to design, produce, operate and analyze the outcomes of a pop-up retail store on campus. Such a pop-up store offers the experiences of a grand opening and closing, planning, promotions, merchandising, logistics, accounting and customer service.



Student-run businesses at University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Image sourced at http://www.bloomberg.com/ss/07/11/1130_studentbiz/source/6.htm



Student business at University of Colorado

Image sourced at http://www.bloomberg.com/ss/07/11/1130_studentbiz/source/2.htm

WIL in South Africa

The term WIL was introduced via the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) in 2007. One of the strategic objectives of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is to provide an interface between the workplace and learning institutions and to promote quality learning, at work, and for work. Workplace learning is an integral part of a qualification, aimed at overcoming students' lack of practical experience. Skills shortages have forced the higher education sector to include WIL to improve graduate employability.

Strong partnerships with industry and clear linkages between education and the world of work are needed to promote work placement opportunities. Unfortunately, there is a policy vacuum and WIL is managed differently by different universities, in terms of the organisations' own policy frameworks, and is usually unfunded and informal. Thus only a few students have benefited from WIL. For successful student learning, a three-way partnership between the university, the students and the workplace organisation is needed, with all role-players having clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and with a clear distinction between disciplinary knowledge (university) and situated knowledge (workplace).

Implementation of WIL

For students to enter the workplace with marketable, relevant and transferable skills, universities need to target students' job skills, such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving, and basic workplace etiquette, such as coming to work on time, working as a team, critical thinking and business savvy. Therefore the curriculum needs to integrate professional and academic skills. Although WIL can never cover the full syllabus, it should be a reflection of the curriculum, and expectations should be carefully managed. This should be achieved via a logbook, which should include policies and guidelines to guide students and staff, a code of conduct for students at the workplace, compliance with all the requirements of the WIL programme, a WIL student agreement, as well as specifying the required academic standards.

Conclusion

The literature indicates that preparing work-ready students through teaching and learning, including WIL, is a complex and challenging task and requires strategic management and skillful balancing of educational, administrative and professional demands. One way of meeting these demands is to offer WIL on campus, in a university-owned store.

FINDINGS

As the research project progressed, and the opinions of retailers, educators, lecturers and other stakeholders were collated, the following decisions emerged:

- The retail store should be managed by a board comprised of representatives from the university, students and retailers. The board should make decisions on how to run the store so it meets the requirements of all stakeholders.
- Four possible models for the retail store emerged from the discussions, as indicated on next page.



THE MODELS

<p>Mini-mall – shelves in store</p> <p>A mini-mall with different retailers responsible for their own mini-stores. Allocated shelves and space – competing on own brand products.</p>	<p>One departmental store – different retailers</p> <p>One store consisting of a coffee-shop with different departments. Each retailer responsible for one department on allocated shelves/spaces – no competing products, with co-operation on workplace learning. Own brand products.</p>	<p>Mini-mall – independent stores</p> <p>One shopping centre with independent stores. Mini-mall board, with co-operation between retailers on workplace learning.</p>	<p>One independent retailer for operations</p> <p>One independent retailer store operating within the whole area. Board for co-operation between stakeholders on workplace learning.</p>
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ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF EACH MODEL

The various benefits and weaknesses of each store option were identified as shown below.

MINI-MALL – SHELVES	DEPARTMENT STORE	MINI-MALL – STORES	ONE STORE
 Benefits			
<p>Retailers train own recruits on their own products and systems</p> <p>More retailers involved</p>	<p>Students get training on all aspects of the business and on business as a whole</p> <p>One standardised logbook</p> <p>Co-operative environment for participating retailers</p>	<p>Retail operators – better management and performance</p> <p>Students get exposure to all aspects of a business and more retailers</p> <p>Retailers build own brand and better profit centre</p>	<p>Retail operators – better management and performance</p> <p>Students get exposure to all aspects of a business</p> <p>Retailer builds own brand and better profit centre</p>
 Risks / Challenges			
<p>Competitive environment in insignificant small areas</p>	<p>Management of students' workplace experience and completion of logbook</p>	<p>Co-operation between retailers</p>	<p>Support of other retailers in training and research</p>

			
MINI-MALL – SHELVES	DEPARTMENT STORE	MINI-MALL – STORES	ONE STORE
ROLES AND FUNCTIONS			
Each model has its own unique roles and functions which would have to be considered, depending on which model is selected.			
BOARD			
Operations			
Policy, eg product mix in store Common areas (eg image, safety, security) Strategic direction	Policy, eg departments Performance of all aspects of business Strategic direction	Policy, eg product mix in mall Training and research strategies Strategic direction	Training and research strategies
MENTORS			
Provide guidance to students on all aspects of the business			
SHOP MANAGER			
Operational management – certain functions			
Common areas	Common areas	All areas	All areas
STUDENT MANAGERS			
Manage, with retailer, the shelves and scheduling of supervisors	Manage, with retailer, the department and scheduling of supervisors	Manage, with retailer, the store and scheduling of supervisors	
STUDENT SUPERVISORS			
Supervisory function of shelves (eg scheduling students and stock management)	Supervisory function of the department (eg scheduling students and stock management)	Supervisory function in the store (eg scheduling students and stock management)	
STUDENT GENERAL WORKERS			
Operational functions of shelves (eg displays, replenishment, cleaning)	Operational functions of department (eg displays, replenishment, cleaning)	Operational functions in store (eg displays, replenishment, cleaning)	

FACILITY DESIGNS AND STRUCTURES

All respondents preferred different models for different reasons. Because of the inability to reach consensus, it was felt that the university should choose the model. It was suggested that either model 3 or 4 would be best suited to the available space. If more than one retailer is involved, the space should be retail-brand neutral and non-competitive, and the emphasis should be on teaching and learning, and not on competition and achieving sales.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Because of the limitations of the store size and logistics, lecturers should isolate the most important aspects of learning to be completed in the store. These can then be focused on via the logbook, detailing what must be learned in the store.

The store manager must serve as mentor to the students and sign off their logbooks – ideally a retired branch manager, but with an ability to understand academic curricula and the work required from the student.

Facilitators/assessors of the WIL component must be sourced from the retail sector.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Housekeeping and security should be the responsibility of the university, although with model 4 the retailer could take full responsibility.

There should be one pay-point. Purchases must be reconciled at the end of each day.

Retailers should make an initial investment to cover start-up costs, but the store needs to be self-sustaining after a certain period.

There should be clear overall management of the shop but governance should be by a board comprised of representatives from the university, students and retailers.

RECOMMENDATIONS**OPERATIONS AND MARKETING**

The target market should be staff and students on the campus, and trading times should coincide with campus opening/closing times, mainly for security reasons. Although some felt this was contrary to the retailing ethos, and others worried about poor profitability, it was agreed that the goal was teaching and learning, rather than generating profits.

A variety of products should be stocked to meet the needs of the target market.

CURRICULUM CONTENT

Retail activities can be split into operational, supervisory and managerial levels, and for work experience, they were also split into the three educational levels: operational – first year of study; supervisory – second year of study; and managerial – third year of study. Each student, for each level, should complete 40 hours of work (five workdays).

A detailed logbook specifying activities to be done at each level was developed.

Due to the small size of the shop and other logistical problems, it is not possible for all the WIL requirements to be achieved at the on-campus store.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this model will inspire further research, and serve as a WIL model for other academic institutions to set up retail stores on campuses to promote WIL and ensure that their education and training meets the needs of the economy. Debate amongst stakeholders and further research should be encouraged.

THE W&R SECTOR

W&R is the fourth largest contributor to GDP and the 30 000 tax-registered retail enterprises employ about 20% of the total economically active workforce according to Stats SA.

The recent update of the W&R Sector Education and Training Authority Sector Skills Plan: 2011-2016 says data shows that about 86% of registered enterprises in this sector are small and micro enterprises, 9.5% medium size and 4.5% large companies. Only 66% of operational retail traders are formally registered and contributing to the fiscus, suggesting there are over 100 000 informal (unregistered) traders in the sector accounting for 10% of national retail turnover.

The main employment increase has been in the informal /SMME sub-sector.

Wholesale&Retail **LEADERSHIP CHAIR**

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THE WRLC

The Wholesale and Retail Leadership Chair (WRLC) at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) was established in 2013, based on an initiative by the Wholesale & Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) to contribute towards sector research and professional qualifications development at Higher Education levels.

A national survey report entitled Priority Research Needs of the South African Wholesale and Retail Sector marked the first step taken by the WRLC towards the creation of a basis for relevant research in this dynamic business sector.

The WRLC has now completed many research projects in the sector and reports on these studies are available at <http://wrlc.org.za/research-2-2/completed-research/>



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The full report is available at http://wrlc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Project-2015_15-Report-A-model-for-WIL-CPUT-store.pdf and

http://wrlc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Project-2015_15-ANNEXURES-31-Mar-16.pdf

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