

Wholesale & Retail LEADERSHIP CHAIR

PRESS RELEASE

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E-LEARNING STRATEGY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN RETAILING: A FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION

A recent research project of the Wholesale & Retail Leadership Chair at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology set out to identify an e-learning strategy for the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA), to support the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector in South Africa.

The project, led by Jonathon Aspelng, employed an exploratory desktop literature study as methodology. South African white papers, policies, quality assurance frameworks, and legislation were reviewed, as well as international journal articles and academic research, focusing on workplace e-learning and the W&R sector.

E-learning is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education and training, and encompasses online training, webinars, and virtual classrooms. So-called "distributed" learning allows instructors and learners to be in different locations, at different times. National retailers' annual reports and websites bear evidence that e-learning is growing in popularity in South Africa, also in the W&R sector. Retailers are increasingly using ICT to reduce costs and improve effectiveness.

The implementation of e-learning policies is relatively new, and the literature is generally silent about strategies for disadvantaged groups. E-learning is still in its early stages in developing countries, which experience unique challenges regarding infrastructure, information access, and technical and organizational support. Constraints to the growth of e-learning include lack of access to electricity, mobile devices, and ICT.

The research sought to identify the main drivers, benefits, and barriers with regard to e-learning in the workplace. The **drivers** for e-learning include the growth of information, and the expansion of technology. The **benefits** of e-learning include greater access to training, flexibility, scalability, cost-effectiveness, and minimal down-time. E-learning reduces travel and time away from work, and is therefore useful for a geographically dispersed workforce. **Barriers** to e-learning include limited access to the internet and ICT, high up-front costs, a lack of relevant interactive content, and a lack of management and technical support.

The study found that raising awareness among managers and employees regarding the benefits of e-learning was a key driver for e-learning initiatives. Other findings included that e-learning improved training speed, and reduced employee down-time. Employees could return to online resources at any time, reinforcing learning that had taken place. Large organizations were more likely to adopt e-learning than small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), because they had better infrastructure, and could more readily achieve economies of scale. However, SMEs could overcome barriers through collaborative networks. Managers' support for e-learning in the workplace, including allocating sufficient time for e-learning, was critical to success.

Based on the findings of the research, the report recommended that the W&RSETA:

- focuses on distributed learning, so that instruction can take place independent of time and place;
- aligns its e-learning approach with evolving government policies;
- engages in a comprehensive planning and feedback cycle with relevant stakeholders, with a view to implementing a pilot e-learning programme; and
- creates an online e-learning database, and a register of programmes and training materials for use by training providers.

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