

# Can international certifications stimulate local success?

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Developed countries are usually the source of globally recognised certifications, yet local industry professionals face challenges typically unique to South Africa. Are these programmes designed for their own advanced economies? Or can they address conditions outside their borders?



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Supply chain management (SCM) professional accreditation provides a suitable case study. Developed countries can consider innovative approaches to supply chain efficiencies such as drone delivery or logistics driven by Artificial Intelligence. Countries like South Africa however still contend with fundamental issues and challenges. Technology is embraced in some areas of the supply chain, like logistics tracking, but is often underutilised or incorrectly applied in optimising supply chain efficiencies, in many cases a result of inadequate, or indeed the lack of supply chain knowledge and skills.

According to 2012 studies carried out by KPMG, South African supply chain management fared better than other African nations, better in only some respects than other BRICS members, but poorly compared to developed countries.

A lack of supply chain skills and expertise is a major contributor to the supply chain challenges faced in South Africa. Many individuals are skilled in certain aspects of logistics but few have the knowledge and experience to see beyond

their scope of responsibility and understand the upstream and downstream impact of their decisions. This inhibits supply chain efficiency and improvement initiatives.

In view of these challenges, the value of a consistent internationally recognised – and reputable – certification cannot be underestimated in terms of building supply chain capability and in providing a yardstick against which to test candidates applying for supply chain positions.

## Principles over conditions

The skills gained in certification courses are internationally recognised because of their ubiquity. Although local variables may differ, the management principles persist. Therefore, regardless of South Africa's challenges, international certifications still offer some of the best solutions for addressing them.

## National Qualification Framework integration

Certification doesn't exist in isolation. For example, the current TETA (Transport Education and Training Authority) Career Guide, Volume 3, advises that the entry-level requirement for international SCM accreditation is NQF Level 6. Candidates must first achieve an SCM qualification with an entry-level requirement of NQF 4 (matric level). Such gateway courses are provided by national universities and lecturers. The indication is that international certification must be preceded by local training.

## Synergy of qualifications

South African professionals can enjoy the best of both worlds as a mix of local education and international training can

produce a broader and more balanced range of skills than found in developed countries. In terms of SCM, accredited locals will often have more to offer South Africa than their international counterparts.



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## Global assurance

International certification assures global customers that, regardless of constraints, a high level of industry expertise is being applied. Global vendors have more confidence when integrating their supply chain with one managed by accredited professionals, so it's good for business.

## Future proofing

As investment in South Africa grows, infrastructure and technology will continue to catch up with first world countries, and so the demand for professionals who understand the complex dynamics of advanced supply chains will increase. We need to prepare for the future, and that means gaining the required expertise before it becomes critical.

## Global network

Lastly, international certification provides secondary benefits like linking graduates to a global alumni network. Local supply chain managers can collaborate with those in developing nations who have faced the same problems and share solutions. Such a resource can help us leapfrog problems.

International certification – such as the APICS CPIM, CSCP, and CLTD designations for SCM professionals – augments local expertise rather than replaces it. Overall, it offers South African professionals access to the leading principles and practices that are essential to addressing local constraints. It validates the skill level of supply chain resources. But most of all, it provides us with a robust base of supply chain capability on which we can compete with global markets.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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