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Unisa and SAPICS Join Forces to Cultivate Young SCM Practitioners

Young graduates and professionals often lack the “soft skills” needed for workplace success. To address this, Unisa’s Supply Chain Management section (Department of Applied Management), in collaboration with SAPICS, has launched a series of lunchtime online MiniMaster classes to empower the next generation of supply chain professionals. The 2024 series was structured into six sessions across three comprehensive classes, each designed to arm participants with essential skills and insights.

The inaugural class, held on 13 August, concentrated on instilling core values and personal branding within supply chain management. Dr Alicia Weber, a Senior Lecturer at Unisa, led the first session by stressing the importance of embodying key values necessary for a successful career in the field. She emphasised the SCM acronym, Solutions-driven, Committed, and Moral, as the foundational pillars that guide supply chain professionals. Dr Weber detailed the importance of being solutions-driven by showcasing creative problem-solving techniques that address the complexities of modern supply chains. She encouraged participants to focus on developing unique solutions rather than merely identifying problems. Being committed, she stressed, involves going beyond basic job requirements to achieve goals, emphasising the significance of lifelong learning and time management to ensure dependability. Finally, she defined being moral as adhering to ethical principles, underscoring that professional integrity is non-negotiable for long-term career success.

In the second session of the class, Ms Nikita Reddy, School Manager at Mancosa, expanded upon the concept of strategic personal branding. She outlined how a robust personal brand distinguishes professionals in the competitive landscape of supply chain management. Ms Reddy emphasised the significance of combining personal values, strengths, and unique attributes to create a compelling brand. She guided participants on crafting a concise, impactful 30-second self-introduction to articulate their personal brand effectively. Additionally, Ms Reddy underscored the importance of cultivating an online presence through platforms like LinkedIn and taking advantage of networking opportunities at industry events to build a lasting and dynamic brand identity.

The second class, which took place on 5 September, titled "Navigating The Supply Chain Management Fast Lane: Enhancing Your Personal Agility," offered a compelling look at personal development and adaptability. Ms Regina Naiker from Castrol began with her personal narrative of achieving work-life balance. Drawing on over 22 years of experience managing motherhood, a career, and academic pursuits, she emphasised realistic goal setting and the breakdown of tasks into manageable steps to maintain motivation and clarity. Ms Naiker shared strategies on how to create smaller, actionable milestones that help in tracking personal and professional progress. She advocated for openly communicating with family, friends, and colleagues to garner support, suggesting this is critical for balancing personal responsibilities with professional growth. This session underscored the role of self-care practices in achieving sustained high performance and personal fulfilment, with Ms Naiker urging participants to prioritise physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Continuing from this foundation, Ms Dikeledi Sathekge of Coca-Cola explored thriving within fast-paced organisational environments. Drawing from her background in logistics and digital transformation, Ms Sathekge highlighted the necessity of adaptability and continuous learning to remain effective in dynamic settings. She emphasised the importance of understanding what "fast-paced" means in the context of supply chains and how professionals can keep up by staying curious and open to new knowledge. Ms Sathekge advised that personal branding should focus on what individuals wish to be recognised for professionally, and she emphasised the importance of teamwork and collaboration, encouraging professionals to prioritise collective efforts over personal accolades. By focusing on incremental improvements rather than perfection, Ms Sathekge suggested that professionals can make meaningful contributions to their organisations.

On 1 October, the third class, titled "Balancing Tech and Talent - Skills for Success in AI-Enhanced Supply Chains," explored the integration of technology and human skills in modern supply chains. Mr Alvin Kalideen from SANDVIK Group opened the session with a reflection on the historical evolution of AI and its impact on the supply chain industry. He discussed how technological advancements like SAP and Netstock are reshaping supply chain processes and emphasised the indispensable role that human insight plays in leveraging these tools effectively. Mr Kalideen provided an overview of critical AI systems and how professionals can use their problem-solving abilities to optimise AI applications in supply chain operations.

Mr Tony Mthethwa of Microsoft presented his take on the critical skills needed in AI-enhanced workplaces. He highlighted the necessity of blending technical competencies, such as data analytics and process engineering, with essential soft skills, including communication, adaptability, and creativity. Mr Mthethwa reassured participants that AI's purpose is to augment human capabilities, urging them to view AI as a collaborator rather than a threat. By taking initiative and exhibiting creativity in problem-solving, professionals can maintain valuable roles in the industry, even as AI continues to evolve.

These MiniMaster classes play a pivotal role in developing the crucial soft skills required for emerging supply chain professionals. By integrating discussions on core values, personal branding, adaptability, and the evolving integration of technology, the series prepares students to meet industry demands with confidence and competence. Fostering a workforce capable of navigating complex and dynamic industrial landscapes, the classes ensure participants are not only ready for the workplace but positioned to thrive and innovate. Remarkably, students have already provided enthusiastic feedback, praising the classes for their enjoyment and the tangible value they have gained. Participants testify to the course's effectiveness and the new skills they have acquired, leaving them better prepared and motivated to make significant contributions to the field of supply chain management.



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