

MFSA's recognition of prior learning a tool for transformation

The Marketing Federation of Southern Africa, in association with the Prior Learning Centre (a division of LearnSys) has developed a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process for marketers. This process is set to be widely employed in the marketing community as a tool for development and transformation.

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Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process where adults can receive recognition for skills and knowledge gained from experience rather than formal qualifications. Says John Arnesen of the MFSA's Quality Management Unit, "Candidates who were unable to complete degrees, but have the requisite knowledge gained from years of experience, are able to be assessed and obtain the formal recognition that allows them to be appointed, promoted or enter further formal training such as the Chartered Marketer programme."

RPL is widely employed internationally and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) made RPL a fundamental component of the skills development strategy in 1995. "RPL is referred to in the SAQA guidelines and policies as a mechanism to transform society and redress past inequalities in education, training and employment opportunities," says Karen Deller of the Prior Learning Centre. "However, SAQA did not provide specific guidance on how RPL should be implemented in the different professions, which is where we recognised a distinct need for the marketing community."

"RPL programmes have not been widely employed in South Africa to date," says Deller. "One of the biggest barriers is the lack of accredited assessors and the knowledge to design valid and reliable assessment tools. Other barriers include start-up costs, lack of practical implementation knowledge, a shortage of unit standards and qualifications and the overall lack of understanding surrounding RPL."

The MFSA, working with the Prior Learning Centre, has overcome these barriers by developing a detailed RPL assessment programme for marketers that has the additional benefit of serving as an alternative entry into the Chartered Marketer programme, a qualification that is rapidly earning respect in the South African marketing community. "RPL was developed as a route for accessing the Chartered Marketer programme for candidates who do not meet the NQF 7 qualification criteria (honours or masters degree). Candidates who use RPL may have an NQF 7 qualification, but have not specialised in marketing; or have many years of experience in the marketing profession, but do not have an NQF 7 qualification," says Arnesen.

"RPL can be used both as a selection device and a development oriented system. The intention of MFSA within the broader South African context is to facilitate progression within the marketing profession, redressing unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities," says Arnesen. Poorly qualified marketers stuck at entry-level positions within organizations can be given recognition for their knowledge and skills, enabling them to be promoted and partly alleviating the skills shortage in the middle corporate ranks. Their movement would also free up entry-level positions.

RPL further facilitates the Employment Equity process – enabling companies to assess marketing candidates against their identified potential position. That is a compelling business case for corporates –

both big and small. A portion of the costs could be claimed against the Skills Development Levies paid to the Sector Education and Training Authority.

Says Deller, "Once companies understand the benefits of implementing RPL, they will be more inclined to build it into their HRD strategy. The training providers and SETAs alone cannot implement enough RPL to bring about the social transformation envisaged by SAQA. The workplace has to become part of the process."

"The role of marketers has become increasingly critical and marketing strategy a leading function in the formulation of business strategies. The reputation of the marketing profession is heavily dependent on marketers demonstrating a commitment to maintaining the highest standards of competence," says Arnesen.

"Working adults need to be learning constantly if they are to continue contributing value to their employers. Training opportunities and mechanisms to get adult learners back into a formal learning environment will need to be developed quickly if South Africa is to become competitive, and for the marketing community, the MFSA RPL initiative is a firm step in the right direction."

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