

Supply chain practitioners urged to stay ahead of disruption

At the 39th SAPICS conference at Century City in Cape Town, Sean Culey, vice-president of Manucore in the UK, addressed supply chain management professionals, highlighting the extent of 'creative destruction' underway in the global economy.



Sean Culey

The conference has brought together some 800 delegates from across Africa and abroad, to discuss cutting-edge trends and technologies in supply chain management.

Culey told delegates that technology is “turning certainties into absurdities” – with a “triple-whammy” of robotics, automation and convergence already severely disrupting traditional ways of doing business.

“The world’s largest transport company owns no vehicles, the world’s largest retailer holds no inventory, the largest accommodation provider holds no real estate, and the world’s largest movie provider has no cinemas,” he said. “A five-year-old company that has developed an app that hails cars, is worth more than the companies that make the cars. This is our world in transition.”

Supply chain skills in Africa

He said the digital world of e-commerce is impacting harshly on business in the physical world, with a “retail apocalypse” underway among the traditional giants of retail like the global superstores.

Opening the conference on Monday morning, SAPICS president Mungo Park urged supply chain practitioners to develop innovative ways of staying ahead of economic disruption, highlighting the increasingly integrative role that supply chain plays in today’s corporate environment. He also emphasised the importance of developing supply chain skills in Africa, as well as accrediting professionals to reflect the vital role they play.

Leveraging technology

Speakers at the conference explored issues including automation, robotics, 3D-printing, virtual reality and ‘big data’ – sharing views on how best to leverage new technologies to improve operational efficiency.

Woolworths' head of supply chain, Bradley Nitsckie, contributing to a panel discussion on supply chain trends, emphasised the need for re-skilling in the supply chain space – as practitioners come face-to-face with new and more demanding challenges to their roles and their businesses in future.

Based in the US and responsible for PwC's Supply Chain Planning Centre of Excellence, Douglas Kent urged businesses to generate realistic baseline assumptions on which to quantify and monetise their risks – as a starting point for managing the volatile business environment.

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