

# The lifeblood of a world-class logistics business

Bidvest Panalpina Logistics (BPL) defines a chart for success in developing a robust, quality workforce through top-notch skills development.

At the beginning of September, the 2018 World Bank Logistics Performance Index ranked South Africa as the third most competitive market behind Thailand and China in terms of logistics performance among upper-middle-income economies, and at number 33 of the 160 countries assessed.

While this sounds like good news, our overall ranking was at 20 out of 160 just two years ago. What's happened in the interim that caused that 13-point slide and, more importantly, what can we do to reverse it?

The six core components used to measure performance focus on the efficiency of customs and border clearance, the quality of trade and transport infrastructure, the ability to track and trace consignments, the ease of arranging competitively priced shipments, and the competence and quality of logistics services.



While individual operators in the logistics space have no control over some of these, one area in which they can make a difference is competence and quality.

'Since a company is the sum total of what employees achieve individually, organisations should do everything in their power

to ensure that employees perform at their peak,' says Sudashini Gounden, national learning and development manager at Bidvest Panalpina Logistics, a local logistics organisation with an international footprint.

'At BPL we believe that there is enormous value in organising proper training and development interventions for employees, as training allows employees to acquire new skills, sharpen existing ones, perform better, increase productivity and be better leaders.' adds Gounden.



'At BPL, we offer school leavers the opportunity to undertake a fixed-period of learnership during which they're enrolled on a course of study leading to the award of a recognized national qualification in a field related to the company's activities' says BPL's HR director, Harry Dimo.

And if BPL offers the successful learner a permanent position, further studies and development may be on the cards ranging from entry level to management training.

'Over the last decade, the BPL Academy Learnership programme has grown from two learners to the current group of over a hundred learners, and employees who started out as unemployed learners on learnerships are now playing key roles within the business,' says Gounden. 'An example is Fortunate Mboweni, who started her journey as a learner from Tembisa township to a professional logistics consultant, and in 2014 she won the Young International Freight Forwarder of the Year award, beating out entries from all over the world.'

BPL also offer recent graduates the opportunity to undertake the in-house tailored graduate programmes to acquire relevant work experience for potential employment. BPL's graduate programme aims to create a talent pipeline of high-potential candidates to fulfil management and leadership positions in the future within BPL and to assist with the alleviation of key scarce and critical skills within the organisation.

The alumni of graduated learners from the BPL Academy Learnership programme are part of the successful recipe of mentoring incoming learners – an important aspect of on-the-job training at BPL and, Gounden points out, beneficial to both mentor and mentee. 'The mentoring process funnels the mentor's past experience to assist the mentee in avoiding the pitfalls and challenges of the environment, and it also grows the mentor in their ability to communicate and sharpen their skills.'

The impact from on-the-job training and mentorship is 'almost immediate', says Gounden, and this type of training can play a key role in quickly creating additional capacity within a business.

Investment in skills development of the workforce applies across all roles in the organisation, notes Dimo: 'We promise our clients a certain degree of service delivery, and we must make sure that all our employees – from client-facing to back-end office – are geared up to provide those services.'

Indeed, developing employees has everything to do with BPL's 'customer-centric' business model, which puts the customer at the centre of every decision taken by every person in the value chain. 'Helping employees fulfil their potential is part of this, as investing in our people empowers them to optimise productivity and self-motivation, which can only be good for our clients and growth,' says Dimo.



'We don't operate in a vacuum; we operate to provide partnership and optimum service to our clients, and we need to ensure that we can work in parallel with our client's plans to ensure efficiency – we need to know and understand their long-term strategies in order to tailor relevant solutions that will inform us where we need to position our resources for development.' This also feeds into BPL's all-important visions and values, which includes growth and development, fostering pride and celebrating success.

Dimo also points out that as clients' needs to change and evolve, so BPL's must too. 'For example, today's retail corporate isn't the same as yesterday's retail industry; today, it's much more multifaceted and diversified with continuous inquisitiveness for opportunities to growth, and our people have to understand and be prepared for all this challenges in order for us to remain relevant.'

'The international logistics world is a constantly evolving environment and it's vitally important that we keep our people up to date when there is a change,' Gounden confirms. 'In this ever-changing and fast-paced corporate world, training and development is an indispensable function. Training plays a key role in managing the change, and in at time of an avalanche of technological advancements and innovations, manual labour and human touch will always be essential in industries such as customer service, sales, customer support, and IT.'