

Wits University helps SA business to go global

South African companies can, it is claimed for the first time, work through the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) to achieve international accreditation for their business process standards and in so doing propel themselves on to an equal footing with global competitors.



South Africa's first lead appraiser, Dr Pieter van Zyl, from the Johannesburg Centre for Software Engineering (JCSE) at Wits, is driving the accreditation process called Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI), by helping companies overhaul their IT procedures to bring them in-line with international best practice.

CMMI is a United States-developed accreditation system that has been universally adopted. It measures the maturity and capability of a company's IT processes and can be used even by the smallest company.

Finished... on time, within budget

Professor Barry Dwolatzky, director of the JCSE, gave a practical example by explaining that if a company was contracted to build, for instance, soccer stadiums for the World Cup was rated at a high CMMI level, it would have the procedures and practices in place to guarantee all its projects would be finished on time and within budget.

"CMMI adoption in South Africa is a coming together of academia, government and business to build on our strengths and make our country competitive," Dwolatzky said.

The initiative and upgrading of CMMI-related skills is being supported financially by the Department of Trade and Industry (dti) through the Wits Centre.

Meeting internationally recognised business standards is imperative

Thulani Mpetsheni from the dti said highly rated CMMI companies had lower margins of error and were able to meet their targets on time and within budget.

"If more South African companies are to become global players it is imperative they meet internationally accepted business process standards, which is what CMMI measures," Mpetsheni said.

The CMMI has five levels and companies move upwards as their IT systems and processes improve and become more mature and sophisticated.

Metropolitan Health Group (MHG) is the first company in South Africa to be assessed and accredited by the university using local experts. It achieved a level two rating on the five level CMMI process maturity model.

Metropolitan Health Group is the fourth company in South Africa (along with Imperial Bank, UCS Software and Nedbank which were assessed by foreign experts) to achieve a CMMI rating and is expected to now improve its maturity level steadily.



Prof Barry Dwolatzky (left) director of the JCSE at Wits, Steven Williams COO Group Operations Metropolitan Health Group, Joubert Steyn MD IT at Metropolitan Health Group and Blum Khan CEO Metropolitan Health Group. (Image: Roger Sedres/Image SA)

India, China leading the way

Blum Khan, CEO of Metropolitan Health Group and also for the health business of MMI Holdings Ltd, said the health insurer had decided to gain the accreditation when the dti challenged local businesses to make their systems and procedures more internationally competitive. Many companies in India and China have already achieved level five and consequently were attracting substantial foreign investment to their countries, sometimes away from South Africa.

"This has been a significant shift in the way we do things at MHG," said Khan. "The benefits of this approach filters throughout the organisation and its processes."

Most importantly it gives the customer a far more professional and effective interaction with the business, he said.

Follow the Met example

Mpetsheni said he was delighted Metropolitan Health Group had achieved level two in its CMMI assessment and he was confident the company would progress to level three in due course. The international norm for organisations to progress from one CMMI maturity level to the next is two years, whilst Metropolitan Health Group had achieved this within a year.

The dti is encouraging local companies to follow Metropolitan Health Group's example and adopt CMMI as a framework to improve and grow their business processes and thus place South Africa at an internationally competitive level, he said.

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