Lived experiences

We interviewed Mr Renier A. Swiegers, an experienced project manager for his opinion on how engineers can use data/facts in guiding/leading the development in South Africa. Mr Swiegers has years of experience dealing with engineers of varying experience levels as well ensuring projects run smoothly with the limited data he initially receives.

Mr Swiegers initial stance on the matter was based very much on the infrastructure development of South Africa. He says that engineers’ first resource is the national census as it allows for engineers to appropriately plan for future development. He also stressed the importance of engineers knowing the facts before pursuing a project as poor planning due to lack of data could be the difference between the success and failure of a project. On one project Mr Swiegers was managing in Zambia there was a travel time of 3 months from South Africa. He said that if not all the data or facts were known to them, they could have set the entire project back by months or paid massive courier fees to get equipment to site as soon as possible.

On the more social aspect, Mr Swiegers has seen engineers help younger engineers develop through the mentorship between professional engineers and junior engineers. He also noted that not all professional engineers were as keen on passing on knowledge as others. Some engineers are very goal focused and find mentoring a junior engineer a waste of their time.

When deciding upon new partnerships or hiring new employees the first things Mr Swiegers looks for is past experience, references and very importantly the way people carry themselves. He says first impressions aren’t always the most accurate tool in judging a person’s character, but it definitely contributes significantly in deciding whether to take them on or not.

From experience Mr Swiegers saw that communities and people rely on engineers to provide them with a safe, comfortable design that is easy to maintain. On top of this he says training is one of the best opportunities engineers have to offer to the community.

From speaking with Mr Swiegers we could conclude that data and facts are definitely used in development. No matter which way you look at it; engineers will need to make use of data and facts to drive the economy, infrastructure and social development of South Africa.