



As I sit down to write this piece I happen to be on leave in what we South Africans generically refer to as 'the UK'; perhaps without pausing to think on what United Kingdom actually means (the 1707 Act of Union forming Great Britain and the 1801 Act joining Great Britain and [Northern] Ireland). In one week's time from writing there will be a referendum vote in Scotland to determine if

Scotland will remain an integrated part of the United Kingdom or be instrumental in starting a process resulting in a 'dis-United Kingdom'. It is considered certain by social commentators that should Scotland secure independence from Westminster (governance based in London) then Wales will follow shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, in other parts of Europe the Basque separatists, for example, are watching very carefully how the European Union may respond to an independent Scotland.

This caused me to wonder why an apparent drive for national identity seems at odds with areas of economic alignment pulling nations together, such as the European Union, BRICSA, and even our own Southern African Development Community (SADC), amongst many others. I do not profess to know the answer to this anomaly but perhaps it is just a natural human reaction to finding compromise in complexity?

There are many examples of this sort of anomaly in our mining industry. Leaders at many levels encourage the development of 'team' identities, whether at section, shaft, mine, or company level. This would be akin to the national identity mentioned above. The success, strength, and longevity of these identities are often determined by the strength and forethought of the leadership. At the same time, it has been shown time and again that further profits can be wrung from older mines by the breaking down of previously fixed boundaries between the same sections, shafts, mines, and companies. The success of these re-organizations is often determined by the strength and forethought of the leadership! In my mind, timing is the key that unlocks one or other of the above scenarios as the most appropriate. When to 'go-it-alone' *versus* when to join for greater economic benefit'.

So where am I going with this line of reasoning (assuming you are still reading)?

The South African underground hard-rock mining sectors in gold and platinum have recently been re-positioning and re-committing themselves towards greater efforts towards mechanization of the mining operations. The key drivers obviously being safer and more consistent delivery of profits that will keep more people employed for longer. There are some really exciting initiatives that are currently under development by some of the larger mining companies and also by some of the service providers to the industry. So, following the discussion above, I have to ask the question: If there is now a common socioeconomic necessity, should there not be greater levels of industry collaboration to come up with the technologies and methodologies required to meet the common challenges? It is not as if the South African mining industry has not been faced with similar situations in its history and come up with world-class solutions.

As I have pointed out in my Presidential address, the challenges are severe and the need for action acute. Now is not the time for insular thinking, it is time for greater levels of collaborative thinking and investment than at any time in our mining history. The speed with which we are able to find the collaborative structures and make changes to the mining process in hard-rock mines will determine the measure of success.

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