



Disruption

'An interruption in the usual way that a system, process, or event works' (the Cambridge Business English Dictionary © Cambridge University Press)



Covid-19 has done exactly this. We all had to innovate, creatively adapt, and behave differently as the pandemic disrupted our lives and our livelihoods. Our usual routines and mindsets changed as we witnessed the various ups and downs of 2020 unfolding.

- It was good that families were able to spend more time at home with one another. However, it is unfortunate that at the same time, South Africans witnessed an increase in domestic abuse and violence.
- A clampdown on the sale of alcohol saw a dramatic drop in trauma-related hospital admissions, and this freed up beds for Covid-19 patients. There

were sadly many consequent job losses, which highlighted how urgently our social services need to be improved. To compound matters SAB Miller recently announced that the company was withdrawing an investment of some R2.5 billion into the sector.

- Restricted travel has meant less congestion on roads and pollution levels around the globe have reduced. There have been many reports of increased sightings of animals in areas previously void of wildlife.
- Social isolation has, unfortunately been emotionally unhealthy for many, especially for older folk confined to retirement homes. We have also seen increased levels of depression in younger people living on their own, and among our youth, who should be spending more time socializing with peers.

Our businesses were all affected in some form or another by the pandemic. Employers generally responded quickly at the onset of the lockdown by changing their processes to allow people to work from home. Many have actually benefitted from this disruption and it is now unlikely that they will return to their pre-pandemic ways of operating.

These extraordinary times required careful thought on changing strategies and methods. Our mindsets and paradigms will probably never be the same again, but this has enabled us to adjust for enhanced performance in ways that we may not have previously considered. Entrepreneurs and leaders found creative and innovative ways to deal with the many levels of disruption brought about by the pandemic. It was interesting to see how one restaurateur converted his premises to a drive-in facility, which allowed him to not only survive 2020, but also to prosper as his market share began to improve.

Last year was difficult. It was filled with, at times, unwanted changes that are set to continue into 2021. Although businesses responded remarkably well to the disruption, the profit margins of many were severely impacted, and government revenue from taxes was substantially lower at a time when significantly more expenditure was incurred on managing the pandemic. This has affected our already poorly performing economy, to the extent that an immediate re-adjustment towards economic reform is urgently required. This may, hopefully, have already started, with refreshing signs of improved collaboration between unions, government, and civil society.

The SAIMM is aware that the post Covid-19 world is going to be very different to that of pre-2020, but a big challenge has been the difficulty in predicting just how different the future is going to be. Therefore, despite some radical changes in our collective mindset, our approach to dealing with this uncertainty has been an exercise in agility, while also ensuring meaningful and steady progress on implementing the changes required of the Institute.

The global trend to moving online is now well established, and the SAIMM is following suit. A full online membership interface system is now in place and our website is becoming increasingly user-friendly. It is rich with information and allows members easy access to the many benefits that the SAIMM has to offer. Our staff are now also placing greater emphasis on communicating and marketing our activities through digital and social media platforms

V.G. Duke
President, SAIMM