



Lessons in diversity and inclusion from the Springboks and others



As I write this article, our Springboks, led by their inspirational captain Siya Kolisi, have just won the rugby world cup final for the fourth time, beating our traditional rivals, the All Blacks in the final. The journey has been tough for the talented and dedicated team, and stressful for the ardent South African fans. One-point winning margins and seizing the lead from extremely strong opposition in the dying seconds is not good for the hearts of the supporters, but the subsequent jubilation makes it worthwhile. Turning the game around requires team cohesion, confidence in the abilities of fellow players, and absolute commitment to each objective. When the stakes are high mistakes are made, but the team rallies together and provides support rather than criticism. Successes are hard-won and celebrated exuberantly. It is quite remarkable that this level of cohesion is achieved when the team is so diverse, with different backgrounds, races, shapes, sizes, and skills. There is obvious mutual respect among the players and recognition of their individual contributions toward a common goal.

This is an incredible achievement, particularly when you look back to the apartheid era when there were three separate rugby governing bodies, each representing a different racial group. At that time only the South African Rugby Board (SARB), which represented white people, had any say in international competitions, and selected the national team.

John Cruise's 2011 paper on "The gender and racial transformation of mining engineering in South Africa" summarizes the history of mining legislation (<https://www.saimm.co.za/Journal/v111n04p217.pdf>). Legislation in the South African minerals industry actively prevented racial and gender diversity. Women were not allowed to work underground after the promulgation of the 1911 Mines and Works Act. The objective at the time was to protect women and children from exploitation as labourers in mines. Certain racial groups were prevented from holding blasting certificates and other certificates of competency, and this was purely for job reservation. Since these certificates were necessary for more senior roles, it was not possible for these groups to progress in their career. These regulations were repealed during the 1990s to fall in line with the Constitution of South Africa.

Cruise describes the subsequent transformation of mining engineering education until 2010, which was quite rapid. He shows that the racial composition of mining graduates had reached the point at which it matched the country demographics. Gender ratios had improved from zero to around 30%, where they currently remain. Zelmia Botha's presidential address last year highlighted the relatively low gender ratios (15% to 40%) in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) graduates worldwide, and the societal and environmental factors that contribute to the under-representation. While it remains a challenge to get to 50% representation, there are many women entering the minerals industry.

There is growing evidence to suggest that diverse companies are more innovative, creative, and commercially successful than non-diverse ones. Having a variety of skills, experiences, and knowledge will bring new and better ideas. However, proper inclusion is necessary to unlock the benefits to be gained from diversity. This requires empowering individuals to express their opinions and to pursue their ideas. Steve Jobs famously said 'If you want to hire great people and have them stay working for you, you have to let them make a lot of decisions and you have to be run by ideas, not hierarchy. The best ideas have to win, otherwise good people don't stay.' Leaders need to create a safe, equitable environment, which is free of bullying and harassment. They also need to recognize and celebrate successes. Employees should feel a sense of belonging.

'The greatest contribution of a leader is to make other leaders' Simon Sinek.

Successful and diverse leaders are role models, and attract diverse and talented employees.

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