

CONSTRUCTION WORLD
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Annual FIDIC conference

The engineering industry is more alive with possibilities than ever – a bright future and career awaits those who dare to venture on the road of this exciting trade. Highlighting this is Dr Willem Sprong, director of multi-disciplinary engineering consulting company, GIBB. Dr Sprong, winner of 2010's CESA's Young Engineer of the Year Award' recently attended the annual FIDIC (International Federation of Consulting Engineers) conference in New Delhi, India.

SPRONG ATTENDED THE 19 – 22 September 2010 conference that was labelled 'Managing Innovation – The Way Forward'. This theme is of particular relevance to engineers in South Africa, as innovation is sometimes perceived as an intimidating concept, difficult to practice.

On the first day of the conference, attendees met for an informal meet and greet session where they had the opportunity to meet young engineers from all over the globe. "During my conversations with some of the other engineers, it soon became evident to me that the problems we experience in South Africa regarding matters like skills shortage and succession planning are not unique. In fact, South Africa seems to be better off than most countries," says Dr Sprong.

At the conference, it also came to light that the majority of engineers across the world believe that the risks are too high for them to deviate from the 'tried and tested' and therefore they tend to only push the envelope marginally. It was also argued that clients do not encourage innovation, as they, in most instances, are not prepared to share in the associated risks that come with innovation – a factor that surely discourages engineers from stepping outside the proverbial box.

"Other keynotes address by the president of FIDIC that were of particular interest to me focused on the growth of the engineering profession. It was clear to all that engineering has the biggest influence on life cycle cost, compared to construction. Even with this in mind, most consultants are appointed according to



price and not quality," comments Dr Sprong. He firmly believes that South Africans need to promote engineering as a profession so that this situation is reversed and that quality becomes the deciding factor. "We, the engineers, must maintain high levels of ethics in the industry," he says. "We are the guardians of the construction industry. We must be proud and move forward. Regardless of the fruit thereof, you should do your duty to the best of your ability."

