

FISHING FOR AFRICA: THE IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE OF DIFFERENT STRATEGIES AT TWO FISH PROCESSING PLANTS ON THE SOUTHERN TIP OF AFRICA

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In the age of globalisation and trade liberalisation companies in Africa face increasing global competition, not only in exporting, but also in retaining their share of home markets. Two white fish processing companies in South Africa still manage to dominate the domestic market and export extensively. In order to maintain their competitive edge and deal with workplace challenges and changing socio-economic and political circumstances, the firms have embarked on different paths. One went down the path of employee participation while the other transformed its method of work organisation by installing state of the art technology.

In the paper the outcome of these two distinct approaches is assessed in terms of the performance of the enterprises. Performance is measured across a range of indicators, including production, financial, as well human resource development and labour relations indicators. The data is collected longitudinally to trace the changes in performance over time. Qualitative information is collected from in-depth interviews of key people and from surveys amongst a sample of employees.

From these research methods the impact of employee participation and workplace restructuring on the two companies' performance is assessed. The differences in results between the two firms are compared and the reasons for the differences are analysed and presented.

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Biographical Sketch: Professor Johann Maree

Johann Maree is professor of sociology at the University of Cape Town. His areas of interest in his discipline are economic, industrial and organisational sociology. His academic background is wider: he holds a BSc Honours degree in mathematics from Rhodes University, a BA degree in philosophy, politics and economics from Oxford University, and a masters degree in development economics from the University of Sussex. In 1986 he completed a doctoral dissertation at the University of Cape Town on the Black trade unions that emerged in South Africa during the 1970s. These unions presently form the rump of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

Johann Maree's intellectual interests shifted from the struggle of trade unions in South Africa to the struggle for international competitiveness of the country's industries and enterprises. In the early 1990s he researched an industrial strategy for the textile industry in South Africa and published his findings as a book, *An Industrial Strategy for the Textile Sector* (UCT Press, Cape Town, 1995). After completing the study he joined the Western Cape Economic Development Forum and was instrumental in the establishment of a service centre for small clothing businesses run by people disadvantaged communities. The service centre, Clotex, still exists to date and provides a range of services to small businesses.

Currently Johann Maree, along with Shane Godfrey, co-author of the paper for this conference, is researching the impact of the Workplace Challenge Project on the clothing and fishing sectors in the Western and Eastern Cape. The Workplace Challenge Project is an initiative of the South African government's Department of Trade and Industry with the aim of assisting firms in certain industrial sectors to become world class.

The research for this conference paper on two firms in the fishing industry was commenced independently before the start of the Workplace Challenge project. However, the aim of the research, namely to assess the impact of worker participation, technological and organisational change on enterprise performance, fits comfortably with the Workplace Challenge's aims.