

4th Industrial revolution success demands cohesive national effort

Automation impacts all industries, could grow business and create jobs, and SA can't afford to fall behind

For South Africa to compete successfully in a 4th Industrial Revolution economy, stakeholders across all sectors must work together to drive progress in this country.

This is according to Prof. Marcia Mkansi, an Associate Professor at the Department of Operations Management at UNISA and one of the organisers of the upcoming African Operations Management Conference, to be staged alongside Africa Automation Fair in June this year.

Prof. Mkansi says South Africa still lags world automation leaders such as Germany as China, and even fellow BRICS country India in terms of industrial automation progress. "We shouldn't fall behind and become consumers and adopters of foreign intellectual property. We need to see sectors such as mining, agriculture, manufacturing and healthcare innovating to address challenges unique to our continent."

Prof. Mkansi says that while South Africa has made slow progress, lacking the necessary skills, scale and business confidence to build out globally competitive factories, there are still significant opportunities for 4th Industrial Revolution progress: "There is still a chance for South Africa to take the lead in Africa, but it needs a national effort," she says.

She notes that automation cuts across all sectors, and is not limited to manufacturing or industry. "Automation is the future – it is the basis of the 4th Industrial Revolution. You see it in the service industry, for example, where airports use scanners instead of staff to check passports, and where restaurants have automated payment terminals."

To make 4th Industrial Revolution progress, South Africa needs to embrace a triple helix approach in which government, industry and academia make a coherent commitment to work together to support the country's ambitions, she says. "We need more emphasis on STEM skills and innovation development at grassroots level. We need industry and academia to collaborate to ensure that skills meet industry needs," she says. Prof. Mkansi notes that UNISA is currently collaborating with the Society for Automation, Instrumentation, Measurement and Control (SAIMC) to introduce South Africa's first formal automation qualification, to be delivered through UNISA's department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering.

"Our partnership with Africa Automation Fair is another example of us being proactive in bringing together stakeholders across academia, industry and government to improve collaboration," she says. The African Operations Management Conference will run alongside Africa Automation Fair for the first time this year, allowing conference delegates access to the Africa Automation Fair exhibition area and networking opportunities.

The African Operations Management Conference will bring together over 100 industry giants and experienced academics to exchange ideas, concepts, and research. Speakers

at this year's conference will include the likes of Professor Norman McLennan of the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, who is a trusted business improvement advisor across the breadth of commercial and supply chain activities and is currently advising the China Ocean Engineering Shanghai Co; and Simon Carpenter, Chief Technology Advisor at SAP Africa responsible for leading SAP Africa's Digital Transformation initiatives with a focus on Business Innovation and Thought leadership and providing direction to SAP's customers and partners on emerging business and technology issues such as OT/IT Convergence, Big Data, Business Network Transformation, Mobility, Cloud Computing, and Business Process Management.

The 2nd African Operations Management Conference will be held from 4 – 6 June 2019 at the Ticketpro Dome in Northgate, Johannesburg. Running alongside Africa Automation Fair, the African Operations Management Conference will be presented by UNISA and supported by the National Research Foundation. The theme for this year's conference will be 'Competitive Operations Management for Driving Automation in Africa Forward'.

For more information, please visit www.aomc.co.za

The Connected Industries Conference at Africa Automation Fair 2019 will focus on the economic impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0 / IIoT) on South – and Sub-Saharan Africa, and how to bring this technology shift to South Africa. The Africa Automation Fair 2019 exhibition and conference will illustrate ways to overcome manufacturing stagnation and fast track growth, by showcasing the latest technologies, solutions and models for next generation manufacturing.

Africa Automation Fair is a focused networking platform for the Automation and Control Industry and works closely with industry associations including the IIG and SAIMC. The fair targets senior buyers from South Africa, the rest of Africa and invites participation from international buyers. Presented by Reed Exhibitions, Africa Automation Fair and the Connected Industries Conference will be staged from 4 – 6 June 2019 at the Ticketpro Dome, Northgate, Johannesburg.