



Case study

Fred Mncube - Life-long learning

Tongaat Hulett's investment in training and developing employees is instrumental in not only developing technical skills and current and future leadership, but it helps employees reach their own goals and aspirations. A part of his journey in the sugar industry as well as the company, Fred Mncube has, over the years, been part of several structured training programmes in the engineering field.

From a young age, Fred always dreamt of being a chemical engineer. In his teens he attended Nkandla High School and was meant to matriculate in 1990, but when he was unsuccessful, decided to quit and look for employment. After five years of minimum wage employment on a construction site in Richards Bay, he returned home wanting better for his future. Determined to reach his childhood goal, he returned to his former high school and passed with flying colours. In 1996 he started his Chemical Engineering Diploma at the Durban University of Technology (Natal Technikon at that time), which he completed within the required time.

His journey in the sugar industry started in 1998, when upon completion of his diploma he was accepted for a two-year chemical engineering in-service training programme at the Sugar Milling Research Institute. With the experience he gained from his in-service programme, he first joined Tongaat Hulett in 2000 as a lab technician, where he assisted in sugar crystallisation as well as on all process engineering pilot projects.

Fred then continued to further his studies on a part-time basis through Natal Technikon, obtaining his first B-tech qualification that would further grow and shape his career within the company. In 2004, after the completion of this qualification, he applied and was accepted to Tongaat Hulett's engineers-in-training (EIT) and process engineering programme at the Amatikulu mill for a further two years. During that time, he applied for a second B-tech qualification specialising in Environment through UNISA. He then joined the Tongaat Hulett Technology Group division in 2009 as a chemical engineer and formed part of the operation support team. Currently, he specialises in the automation of pan boiling and the sugar crystallisation process.

Fred was selected to participate in the Tongaat Hulett Management Development Programme, in conjunction with the Stellenbosch University Business School in 2015. He has been involved in several company projects as a commissioning engineer, including the Xinavane Refinery Project. In 2017, he won the South African Sugar Association Cecil Renaud Prize for his paper "Automation of White Pans at the Tongaat Hulett Refinery". It describes the successful automation of a boiling pan at the refinery, detailing the instrumentation installed, the control strategies implemented and the successful preliminary results which have led to the automation of all five boiling pans at the refinery.

Fred believes that Tongaat Hulett is an employer of choice. He said: "Tongaat Hulett are the role players in sugar technology development. They don't just make sugar, but they also develop technologies."