

CASE STUDY

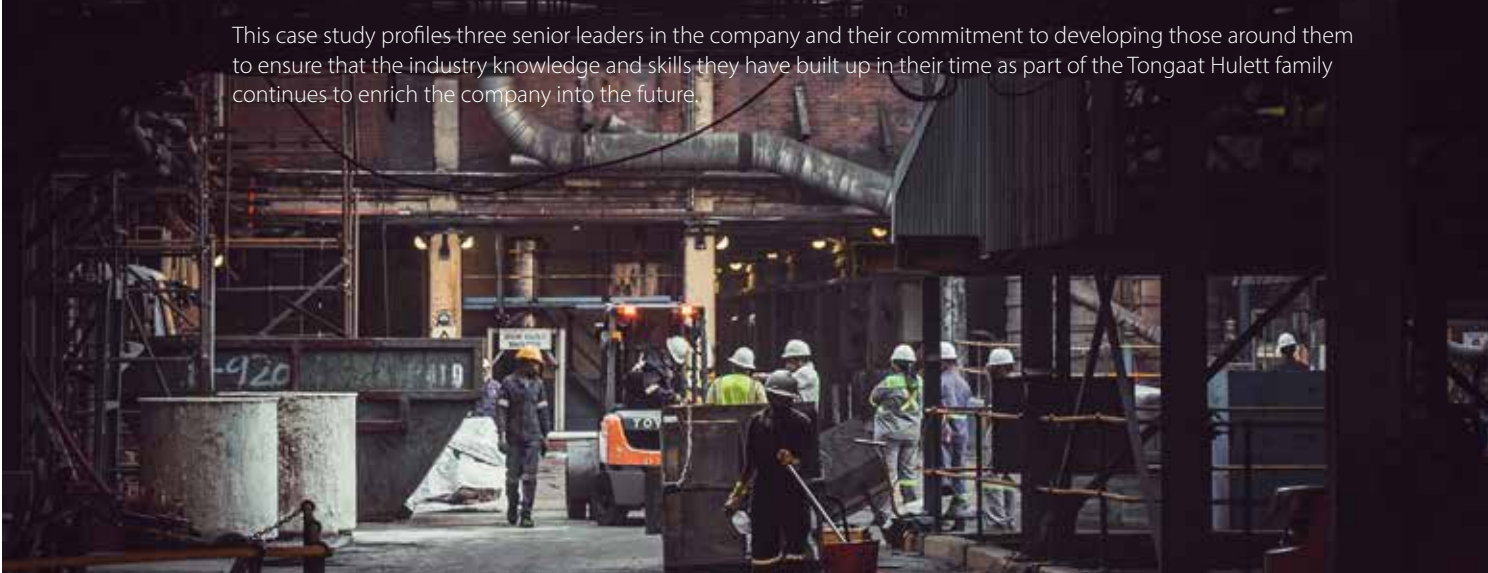
CASE STUDY

REDEPLOYMENT OF CRITICAL INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Tongaat Hulett's restructuring and rightsizing during 2019 reduced the workforce by 10 220 employees through the non-renewal of contracts, voluntary severance packages (VSPs), retrenchments, early retirements and natural attrition.

While the process resulted in significant cost savings and enabled a refresh of business leadership, it also heightened the need to ensure that institutional knowledge is retained in the organisation and passed on to the next level of leadership. While formal structured training is an important aspect of skills development, practical on the job learning from an interested and experienced mentor will play an important role in skills transfer and knowledge retention.

This case study profiles three senior leaders in the company and their commitment to developing those around them to ensure that the industry knowledge and skills they have built up in their time as part of the Tongaat Hulett family continues to enrich the company into the future.



NEVILLE LEWIS

Optimisation Manager

Age 67

Neville has 29 years of experience in the sugar industry and a further seven years in the starch and glucose industries. He has been with Tongaat Hulett for nearly a decade and moved from the Xinavane refinery in Mozambique to the Hulett's Refinery in Durban in 2020.

Neville knows that there might never be a time when he feels that he has handed over absolutely everything, but he is a big believer in the power of systems and controls.

"There are things that I like doing and there are things that I dislike doing," he says. "My approach is to find ways of doing the things I dislike so well that I don't have to keep doing them over and over."

He also takes to heart the example Peter Gibson (previous Factory Manager at Xinavane), who always insisted that, "When you work in a foreign country, you must make sure you leave a legacy with the people you've worked with."

When he retires, Neville says he never wants anyone to say, "This place is such a mess because Neville is no longer here", and his goal for the next two years is to make sure that does not happen.

"Some people want the organisation to miss them when they are gone, but I want to know that the systems, controls and people that I have left behind will be able to keep the business operating without me. I believe that the people I have worked with will have learned enough from me that not only will they be able to maintain the systems and processes, they will be able to improve them."

TENDAI MASAWI

Managing Director of Tongaat Hulett Mozambique

Age 59

Tendai started his career as a sugar technologist and rose through production to management, working at various locations in the sugar industry, particularly at refineries. He joined Tongaat Hulett in Zimbabwe in 2012 as the Technical Director for Hippo and Triangle (to 2019) and then moved to Tongaat Hulett in Mozambique as the Chief Operating Officer before being appointed Managing Director.

"The more you work within these environments, the more excited you get about the work that you do," he says of his more than 30 years in the sugar industry.

He sees excellent opportunities for Tongaat Hulett's Mozambican operations and has a passion for developing local skills, both in the company and in the region. "We have put in place a new management team in Mozambique that can help to put the company back in order and create a business that is not only sustainable but also increasing its contribution to the economy."

Tongaat Hulett Mozambique has been able to increase its domestic production of refined sugar to the point where the country no longer needs to import sugar for various manufacturers. Tendai's goals include commissioning an ethanol plant in Mozambique and ultimately moving to a technical consulting role to help address specific issues.

But one of his key focus areas for the next four to five years is to continue to impart knowledge to the next generation of process engineers. "While there's ultimately a desire to be able to slow down, I have developed a significant amount of knowledge and experience that I want to be able to impart to the next generations," he says. He has a particular interest in building the skills and experience of those who have been historically disadvantaged through poor access to the types of schools and career development opportunities that others may have had.

Literacy levels in Mozambique are low, particularly among women, and in terms of developmental infrastructure such as schools and health facilities, it is one of the world's poorest countries. In 2020, there was a significant reliance on expatriate skills to provide technical support for Tongaat Hulett's operations in the country. Tendai's goal is to develop the necessary skills in-country to reduce this to fewer than 40.

"We are working with universities and technical schools to identify young prospects with the necessary aptitude and potential who can be brought into the company to work with more senior people to develop critical skills. We have a formal mentorship programme that is coupled with an effort to give learners access to experience in our operations in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Our hope is that the person-to-person interactions from these visits will benefit the company through the cross-pollination of ideas to ensure that every aspect of Tongaat Hulett is a success."

By the time he retires, his goal is for Tongaat Hulett Mozambique to be a leading agri-business in the region and to improve the performance of Mafambisse so that it generates significant profit. "At the same time, I'd like to increase the number of key local skills in the company's leadership and reduce the company's reliance on expatriates. Ultimately, it would be good to see the company being run by a 100% local workforce."

MICHELLE JEAN-LOUIS

Business Assurance Executive

Age: 48

Michelle started at Tongaat Hulett in Internal Audit before moving on to Investor Relations and Communications Manager. Her current portfolio covers Internal Audit, Forensics and Sustainability, including SHE. Since March 2020, Michelle has chaired the COVID-19 war room with a small team of leaders who have developed and implemented the necessary protocols.

"Having spent 20 years in the organisation, I have been involved in many aspects of the business," she says. "I have developed a lot of experience and knowledge about some of our successes and failures over that time and I need to ensure that we never repeat the mistakes that we made in the past."

One of the reasons she remains committed to Tongaat Hulett is to use her skills and experience to help develop the next generation of leaders, particularly female leaders. She approaches training and mentorship with the intention of making sure that whoever she trains becomes twice as effective as she ever was. "That way, my skills and experience will not be missed. I may be missed as an individual, but I do not want to be missed for the work that I did. As a leader, the goal must always be to ensure that those who follow you are better than you, and that just as I always aspire to be better, those who work with me should aspire for the same."

While she recognises the value of institutional processes, she has a strong belief in the importance of the individual. "Processes will only be as effective as the people working with the processes. Part of what constitutes 'effective' is ensuring that the individuals are not only skilled and capacitated, but motivated and encouraged to want to improve."

"While the challenge to balance personal and work commitments is ever present, the primary aim is to ensure that balance doesn't come at the expense of performance. One critical influencer of success in this regard comes from a real love of what I do. I feel very privileged to work for this organisation and with my colleagues."

Michelle mentors a group of women at the corporate office. She facilitates monthly meetings, most often in a relaxed off-site setting, to create opportunities to discuss challenges and opportunities, and to address these at individual level.

The results of this process are tangible. Their combined commitment has led to a significant improvement in the overall performance of the group Sustainability team.

"When you're passionate about something, you'll always find the time to do it. I'm passionate about people, and everything I do comes back to my desire to help others succeed."