What is value for your membership? Well, before we get to that, maybe it’s worthwhile to ask who are we. The South African Institution of Mechanical Engineering is the senior body representing the discipline of Mechanical Engineering in South Africa (SAIMechE).

We remain steadfast in the view that “By Knowledge We Advance”. That brings us to the significance of the engineering opinion, particularly, related to the Mechanical Engineering discipline.

To understand the importance of our opinion, perhaps a good place to start will be where that opinion is going to be applied and ultimately its impact on the economy. Think infrastructure for aviation, rail, road, marine and their corresponding systems including their different modes of transport; infrastructure for utilities; medical equipment, mining infrastructure and other such significant assets.

Where does one go for an opinion on the above? It should be undisputed that the home of such opinion is, predominantly, SAIMechE.

Home of the Mechanical Engineering opinion
Lest we forget that the screw pump at a wastewater treatment plant, massive as it is, is useless without an electric motor.

On the other hand, both these pieces of equipment are controlled by a Programmable Logic Controller (PLC) which is electronic. Need I say more? Well, of course we will still defend the Mechanical Engineering opinion with appreciation of the equally significant roles played by other disciplines.

But I said “home” of the Mechanical Engineering opinion. I want to make an assumption that each time one refers to a place as home, a sense of belonging, of pride, of security and of freedom, among others, quickly takes over. Now, open the door of that home, walk in and only find one member sitting there. Surely you will have doubts in as far as one person’s opinion versus the scope of what is expected from a regular home.

On the other hand, the consolidation of many authors’ views is that engineering is the application of science and mathematics to solve humanity’s problems. Given the wide variety of problems in this regard, it makes sense that the logical and structured approach might not be adequate to assist in finding such solutions.

The home owner
Of course the home-owner’s role cannot get easier than keeping family members happy and engaged to maximise and sustain their sense of belonging. But simply saying “keeping members happy” does not provide much. The organisation will have to, together with its community, unpack that to the satisfaction of all members.

Many sources I have consulted on organisational membership suggest that the organisation must ensure provision of continuous value for its members. While that might be correct to some extent, I’ll still go ahead and rephrase that to suggest that the organisation must ensure provision of platforms for creation of continuous value, because what organisation can ever have a conclusive position on what constitutes value proposition for its members without their involvement?

Notwithstanding the fact that members involvement provides more clarity on what they see as value for their membership, it is also expected that their involvement will give them a sense of owning that part of the organisation to which they have contributed.

I suppose it’s a safe assumption, again, to suggest that members who are having a sense of belonging will stay and, further, automatically continue to engage meaningfully for knowledge creation and sharing. And what better place for the Mechanical Engineering stakeholders than in SAIMechE.

Fortunately, SAIMechE already has many platforms to enable easy value exchange for its members. To count but a few, the website and its many features; and also a number of contact sessions. Although those platforms are very important, they should not be confused with real value for membership, which I will attempt to get to soon.
The role-players
Why do we want to congregate? Is it because we want to achieve shared goals/outputs? I’d say yes… The importance of achieving results together cannot be underestimated. Out of that comes member confidence and a sense of fulfilment for those who played a role. Arguably, people who achieve together are likely to stick around together.

The question however remains whether the SAIMechE membership numbers are adequate enough to provide for a representative opinion. According to our records, females in particular make up a heart-breaking 8.9% of the total number of SAIMechE members. According to the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), South Africa has one engineer per 2 600 people compared with international norms, where one engineer serves 40 people.

Considering that we’ve already seen here that the engineering scope can never be perfectly designed to allow for the engineer to follow a logical and structured approach given the wider scope of the problems to be solved, the more innovative and progressive opinions from the members the better!

The organisation provides for a wide variety of categories to enable a wide range of role-players: Company Affiliates, Associates, Honorary Fellow, Fellow, Graduates, Students and open category members where all qualifying stakeholders of this profession are invited to come and contribute meaningfully.

And on a biased note, given the slow uptake by females in this profession, I particularly urge all eligible female persons to rise up and make a difference in this profession. Their colourfulness is sorely missed!

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The value proposition
Is it incentives, rewards, and the likes that will make you proud each time the name SAIMechE is mentioned; or is it SAIMechE’s credible engineering opinion that cannot be ignored by society that will make you proud to belong? I choose a credible engineering opinion.

Whichever one you choose, please still come and advance the organisation with us! With more members involvement, we can be certain of a more accurately defined value proposition, and therefore a better output for SAIMechE.

Cillia Molomo-Mphephu (MSAIMechE) SAIMechE Council Member