

Keep on renewing

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USB PhD alumnus Dr Ferdie Lochner is a great believer in technology management and innovation. As head of IT Finance and innovation leader at the City of Cape Town, he also helps to promote innovation across the city's administration and community. After-hours he does pro bono work, helps with business education and renders technology management services. He spoke to **Cherice Smith**.

Was technology always part of your career plan?

I was raised in the Okahandja district, about 70 km to the north of Windhoek in Namibia. My parents farmed with vegetables and I had very little exposure to the then modern professions. Back then, Okahandja was a military garrison town. My first choice was therefore to become a career soldier and to specifically qualify at Stellenbosch University's Military Academy. After my initial degree studies and compulsory service, I started my career as university lecturer at the Military Academy in Saldanha Bay. My field of study was Military Geography. Personal circumstances forced me to move to the city and, coincidentally, I was appointed as IT manager for the then Helderberg Municipality. Just before I started with my doctorate in Geography and Environmental Science I ended up in Business Science where Technology Management immediately caught my interest.

Workwise, what do you bring to the table?

I have a multidisciplinary professional background. Therefore, my strongest quality is my ability to work cooperatively and holistically with interest groups on technology, innovation and sustainability, and to strive for positive outcomes.

In 2011 you completed your PhD in Business Management and Administration, focusing on Technology Management. What is the value of your PhD?

It helps me to think systematically about and conduct debates about phenomena in my field of study. It also helps me to search for lasting solutions to problems in my professional world. It offers expertise on the conceptual underpinning of Technology Management, which I in fact helped to establish and build through my PhD research and now continue to do through ongoing research and related publications. My experience since the completion of my PhD is that there are increasingly more opportunities for professional actualisation.

How has Technology Management developed over the years?

Technology Management is the field of study which grounds the management of all sorts of technology and related technology innovations, and which promotes the sustainability of it. Over the past 20 years, this field of study has developed from a collection of analysis and prediction techniques to a complete scientific discipline grounded by a corpus of theory.

Technology keeps on changing. How do you keep up?

My field of study covers the full spectrum of technology and it is indeed a challenge to keep up with the speed and complexity of change. New findings and the commercialisation of these findings as technology innovations offer variety, unpredictability and sometimes uncertainty and great risk. I therefore follow a process which entails that I try and keep up with theoretical and conceptual developments on an academic level. I also stay informed through an ever-growing professional network and I use a purpose-built technology radar screen to pick up signals of new developments.

What does your after-hours pro bono work entail?

I help people and organisations to overcome technology challenges in a sustainable way through theory and concepts. Currently, my most significant contribution is mentorship at Innovus, Stellenbosch University's interaction and innovation company, which liaises between the university and industry. I also offer my services as technology adviser and analyst for free so that I can demonstrate some of the most well-known and useful conceptual resources in this field of study.

You are also study leader, promoter and adviser for technology-based studies on MBA and PhD level, and you offer Technology Management services. Why this involvement with business education?

I am a former lecturer and the academic world is still in my blood. There is also a desperate need for more master's and PhD studies in Technology Management and therefore also a need for study guidance. I have been an external examiner for master's theses for a while now and I hope to get involved with the examination of doctoral theses in future.

You are committee member for Continuous Learning Events in the Western Cape branch of the USB Alumni Association. What does this entail?

Our goal is to offer alumni new insights into present-day problems. My work on this committee includes a portfolio of learning opportunities which is collectively managed by the USB Alumni Association and USB. I am also responsible for the alumni's series of Coffee Shoptalks – our main themes are technology growth, economic growth, sustainability, transition management and leadership.

What are your career challenges?

The key challenge is to continually and innovatively renew and to use resources in a smarter and more sustainable way. Gradually switching from one career to another causes additional challenges in the midst of delivery dates for the outsets that I am responsible for in both my official and private careers. I manage this with a strict routine which allows equal time slots for all my professional obligations, taking into account time for self-care and family care. I do official work during my formal work day and, if necessary, also after hours. As technology analyst in my private capacity I only work when official duties do not require my attention. The core challenge is still to be on top of the latest developments in my field of study.

How do you maintain a balanced lifestyle?

I must admit that I am not very successful in maintaining a balanced lifestyle, and that I am paying the price for that, especially with personal relationships. Better planning and communication help me to fulfil my family obligations and handle daily comings and goings. I follow a strict exercise programme. I also spend as much time as possible in nature to study birds and their ecosystems, expand my knowledge of cosmology and think deeper about sustainability.

Finally, what would you still like to achieve?

I feel totally fulfilled and I can only hope for more opportunities to help the individuals, communities, regions and relevant interest groups that I encounter to become happy and more sustainable.

More about Ferdie**• Who is your most important mentor?**

My former PhD promoter Prof Rias van Wyk. He intuitively understood the contributions of my personal role models to my outlook on life and he offered his mentorship accordingly. Thanks to him I could begin to establish myself as an analyst and practitioner of Technology Management. Two good friends and USB alumni, Freddie Bisschoff and Piet Maritz, are also significant contemporary mentors.

• Your pastimes?

Plenty, of which reading enjoys first priority. In particular, I focus on historical biographies, military history, military leaders as well as the Namibian history, and Laurens van der Post's writing about the San people of the Kalahari. I am an avid mountain biker and cross-country athlete. I also love camping and I am a keen landscape photographer.

• What smartphone apps do you use most often?

Facebook and LinkedIn.

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