

Western Cape Branch Event – 19 February 2015

The year kicked off with a thought provoking talk for members of the Western Cape Branch: Gerhard Swart gave guests an insider's view of what took place on the development of the Joule Electrical Vehicle.



This tragic, yet proud achievement was South Africa's attempt to design and manufacture an electrical vehicle. By all accounts this project showed that there is nothing South African Engineers need to feel humble about - the car was not only an aesthetic beauty but was competing with commercial cars in the international arena.

Like the unfolding of a drama, guests were told how the project developed from only four people to over a 100 within half a decade. In spite of having no existing relations with part developers, no regulations with testing authorities and no infrastructure for manufacturing and maintaining such an entity, by the end they managed to successfully create a capability to produce, market, distribute and support a fully electrically powered vehicle.

So why did it end?

In answering this Gerhard submitted a paper to last year's INCOSE conference, which -with no surprise there - won the prestigious best paper award.

“If I could give a single reason as to why the project failed, it was because 50% of the shareholding of the company was owned by the IDC”, Gerhard remarked. It seems that the real system to be managed was not the car but the enabling system that involved complex relations with funders. Funders with different - and often counter productive - objectives, risk aversion, political objectives and, even most worryingly: personal agendas. It was this system that became faulty and ultimately caused the breakdown of the entire project.

Sadly the project was halted not because of technical failure but because the funding just dried up.

As one guest remarked “companies don’t go bankrupt, they just run out of funding”