

Laying a solid foundation for long term success

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Anca Priscu, group director: production at Sumitomo Rubber South Africa (SRSA), one of South Africa's largest tyre manufacturing companies and manufacturer of the Dunlop tyre brand, took on this new role during tumultuous times. Despite this, she has led her division with confidence - taking bold new steps to influence the company's strategic growth path.

Priscu started her journey at Sumitomo Rubber SA in August 2021 to lead strategy development at the company's manufacturing plant in Ladysmith, northern KZN. With Sumitomo Rubber SA poised for growth, Priscu's role is key to bringing this to fruition.

First steps

Using her extensive career experience in leading international companies and a track record in transforming business units to reach their strategic objectives, Priscu hit the ground running.

"No doubt, it's been a busy past year-and-a-half in my role. The first order of business was to lay a solid foundation that would set us up for success in the coming years. We started with the development of the operational strategy for the plant as part of our SRSA Playing to Win strategy. This is paramount as it encompasses all stakeholders such as shareholders, customers, suppliers, employees, and the surrounding communities.

Ensuring that we have everyone on board is key to making our plans a success," she says.

From there, Priscu led the annual business execution plan and created the metrics that would chart their growth path.

"Realistic targets have been set up for the entire business that have taken into account the existing means and abilities. The new organisational structure has changed from multiple business units to one business unit - Ladysmith Plant - with functional managers. This is important, because in order to create a more efficient process, we've reduced the number of management layers in the production process and streamlined our efforts," she says.



Anca Priscu, group director: production at Sumitomo Rubber South Africa (SRSA)



Sumitomo Rubber South Africa's manufacturing plant in Ladysmith, northern KZN

Key achievement

In the middle of her first year, a key achievement for Priscu was leading development of a phased investment plan covering the next five years, which was approved by the global directors of parent company, Sumitomo Rubber Industries.

Over the next few months and years, SRSA aims to ramp up local production, investment and increase its impact on creating employment in South Africa. The plan entails investing in machinery and systems that will ensure the company has capability locally to meet the requirements of Original Equipment manufacturers, gain efficiencies to better serve the local market, and create a better and safer experience for motorists on the road.

“This approval means a massive investment in equipment and systems for the next five years that will modernise our manufacturing facility. The approval shows confidence in our improvements to date and future performance. We can only rise from here and there is great optimism and confidence in our abilities here in South Africa and our role in the industry. Yes, that also means a lot more work to be done, but we can do this together, as a team,” she says.

People-led growth

One of the key moments in her first year was being recognised as a caring leader.

“I remember having a conversation with one of my colleagues, where it was mentioned that I’d been observed to show care for my teams. That struck a chord with me, because it’s important to me that people feel empowered in their roles, that they see growth, and that we are all part of this journey together,” she says.

Priscu described how team growth led to business growth.

“There are varying levels of team effectiveness and performance. The different types of teams are working groups, pseudo-teams, potential teams, real teams, and high-performance teams. My priority was to form the team, have the right people on the bus, in the right seats. I had to recruit for vacancies and find a good team structure that allows them to address issues, work through problems and achieve their common goals for the good of the business. What’s constant is giving people the confidence to find the strength within themselves. As a leader, it’s my responsibility to constantly develop my team’s confidence in themselves and work towards the vision,” she says.

Outside the role

When Priscu is not leading her teams, she is adamant about leading a balanced lifestyle.

"Covid-19 and lockdown brought a lot of things into perspective for people. I've always maintained that having a good work life balance, and prioritising mental and physical wellbeing should always be at the top of anyone's list. Outside the business world, I take the time to quiet my mind and do things that I love such as walking on the beach inhaling fresh salty air, or just looking at the ocean and listening to the waves. I also enjoy reading and cooking. It's important to have balance," she says.

Future growth

Working in manufacturing is one of the most rewarding jobs in the world, says Priscu.

"The automotive industry is South Africa's most important manufacturing sector, contributing 4.3% to GDP in 2021. From an investment perspective, the seven global automotive OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) operating in South Africa invested a total of R8.8bn in 2021, the second highest level on record after the record R9.23bn invested in 2020, while the component sector also invested billions. This reflects the will of the international community to promote localisation, while investing in the best modern technologies available," she says.

Priscu's favourite quote is Darwin's "It is not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change."

With a continued strategic response to changes in the market and industry, undoubtedly Sumitomo Rubber SA will play a valuable role in the growth of the industry.

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Sumitomo Dunlop



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