

AOM set to be held in SA

THE premier event in the field of management, the Global Conference of the Academy of Management (AOM), will be held in South Africa next year – the first time in its history that it will be held outside of the US.

The AOM conference is the largest annual gathering of management scholars in the world and is typically attended by more than 10 000 people. It provides a forum for sharing research and expertise in all management disciplines through invited and competitive paper sessions, panels, symposia, workshops, distinguished speakers, and special programmes for doctoral students.

Professor Kurt April of the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (GSB) who has been elected to chair one of the four streams at the event, says that it is a tremendous honour to be involved, and that as a Brics nation, South Africa is perhaps a natural choice to host the event.

"The West, in the main, is starting to feel the pull of the Brics nations – following the recession, paradoxically the West needs to find its place in the new emerging global economy. Nations and individuals are being forced to adapt to be more relevant in this new world order. This is something familiar to us as

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South Africans, where questions of identity, belonging, connectedness and inclusion dominate – how to make all citizens and non-citizens feel included, so that a nation can develop its full potential. The notions of multiculturalism and otherness are daunting constructs. How do we create environments which enable the best of human endeavour and that do not suppress others?" he says.

The conference will bring Africa's unique capabilities and needs to the attention of the world's organisation and management scholars and, at the same time, provide an opportunity for interested colleagues to collaborate and work on the theoretical and practical problems presented in Africa.

The Economist recently predicted that in the next five years, seven of

the world's 10 fastest growing economies would be African. Unfortunately, much of the continent, like in many of the emerging centres of the world, continues to face challenges around eradicating poverty, improving health, resolving conflict, and ending corruption.

Much of the time will be spent exploring and experiencing South Africa's challenges first hand. Conference participants will spend one-and-a half days of the four-day conference "in the field", directly experiencing South Africa and the phenomena that interest them.

The four conference themes will orient that exploration.

"How can the Americas and Europe integrate their own multiple cultures and therefore make itself a more legitimate part of the wider world? With our own difficult history of colonial oppression, racial oppression, sexism, sexual oppression, religious oppression, and paternalism, we know the importance of proper diversity management," says April, who lectures and researches in leadership, diversity and inclusion at the GSB.

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moon reconciliatory period, and now we need to more rigorously examine our goals. Can we raise the level of genuine co-operation to enable all parties to celebrate their differences, in unity (not necessarily without healthy friction)? As with us, the US has gone through its own difficult period in the 1940s-1960s, Europe over the last 10 years have just begun their own difficult period, Asia and the Middle East has just begun the process of having to embrace other communities and cultures en masse, and because of this the lessons we can learn from one another are tremendous. The juxtaposition of a dual identity between here and other regions is fascinating. These are just some of the issues I hope to see examined through my stream."

April believes that hosting the

conference can only be to South Africa's benefit.

"Hopefully many new academics and other interested parties will see what we have to offer. Word of the conference has already resulted in me starting a new research project, with regards to subjective well-being, with a fellow academic in Canada."

Director of the GSB, Prof Walter Baets, believes that the economic crisis, which many have laid at the door of the traditional business school model, also provides added impetus for finding a new way of teaching and developing business leaders. And with its emerging economy context characterised by uncertainty, complexity and unfortunately, inequalities, Africa is proving to be an ideal setting for learning to lead in this – the emerging market century. It is a place, Baets believes, where the foundation for the future of new ways of doing business are being laid.

Another of the GSB staff, Prof Ralph Hamann, will be co-leading another Conference stream: Navigating Institutions: Business, Government, and Civil Society.

The event is being hosted by the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in January 7 to 10 next year.