

An Exploratory Study of the Problems Faced by Women Graduates Mentees in the Construction Sector: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Women have a limited advancement in the construction industry due to lack of structured mentorship programme. Mentorship has been used as a tool to advance women in their careers. Previous research has shown that the successful mentorship of women was insufficient. In South Africa the construction industry is currently economically active and has a shortage of qualified and skilled professionals. This paper assesses problems to female graduates' mentoring in the South African construction industry, recommends measures to promote their mentoring, retention and participation in infrastructure development and examine perceived career barriers of women in entry level and mid-level positions who were formally and informally mentored. The study was mainly a literature review, qualitative with a special focus on women mentoring problems of employees within organizations. The results indicated only one significant finding, informally mentored protégés rated lack of mentoring as more of a barrier to advancement than who reported being formally mentored. The study contributes to social change by providing empirical support for the importance of formal mentoring in empowering women for future career advancement and a guide for policy changes for government and strategies for industry, education and society to solve the problems women graduates experience in South Africa.

Keywords: construction industry, graduates, mentoring, women

Introduction

In South Africa today, education and training in higher learning institutions has become very expensive. Governments are spending huge amount of state resources in training graduates to develop specific sectors of their economies. This becomes worrying when the flow of knowledge from higher learning institutions to the construction industry is disturbed as a result of women graduates diverting and abandoning their career in construction to other professions, due to problems they are experiencing in mentoring. Women employees in the construction industry are more productive and possess the ability to focus on numerous tasks whereas Barbara et al. (2009) compared the performance of both male and female managers and found no difference in their performances. The question that needs to be asked is “do women have what it takes to work happily in the construction industry, for example, site works and managerial duties and if they do, what is keeping them from this career?” Julia and Donna (2009) mentioned that the under-utilization of women's abilities and talents, and the under-representation of women in the construction industry, continue to serve as

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persuasive reasons for career theorists and researchers to further examine their career development and choice patterns. Mutandwa et al. (2008) perceived that whilst women may be entering the workforce in increasing numbers, female workers remain concerted in certain occupational sectors such as education, health and service sectors, particularly banking, insurance and the retail trade.

Though women have made great developments in the global labour force, gender inequity still exists in various forms. When salaries of male and female managers and professionals are linked, females lag and remain behind males and women's rewards and working conditions are usually less favourable than men's to name a few. South Africa's once male dominated construction industry has become attractive and productive for women. For ages, South African construction industry seemed to eliminate women; seldom women were visible on site or in professional positions. Lately things have changed, more and more women enter into the industry but South Africa is still faced with a problem of seeing women who are taking their cut in construction which is lawfully theirs as being involved in the so-called "non-traditional" sector.

For centuries, women built their huts, houses, clayed floors, thatched roofs, made money and raised children, while men were busy with more important things elsewhere" (Mthembi-Mahanye, 2002). This statement demonstrates that women can work in the construction as long as they can have mentoring and retention strategies to maintain the work-life balance. A large body of research has been devoted to the study of mentoring. Mentoring is also used by organizations to develop employees professionally as well as to develop more loyal employees (Lamm and Harder, 2008). More, mentoring has been a great success for many organizations that have mentoring programs. Developing mentoring relationships has become a common practice among organizations. The number of mentoring relationships in organizations over the past few years have been high in numbers, though, not all individuals have experienced being mentored (Clutterbuck, 2005), particularly in the new entry women graduates. Some of those individuals who lack mentoring opportunities are women and less skilled workers, among others. Mentoring also offers organizations understanding on their employees from other viewpoints other than an employee, their work skills, and their duties on the job. Mentoring supports organizations see their employees more personally and obtain knowledge of their personal needs as well as their work needs. For example, mentoring allows organizations to see their employees from a complete attitude. When organizations meet employees 'needs and address employees concerns, the result is a loyal and productive worker (Gamble, 2013) When companies device mentoring programs that are intended to meet employees at all levels and when employees take full advantage of being mentored the growth of a company often shoot up (Douglas, 1997). Though, women often have struggle in identifying and finding persons to commit to being their mentor , also difficult for them to find a mentor who can help them develop their skill sets, reach their goals, and afford them important feedback in order to assist them advance in the workplace . Several researchers proposed that in order for women to advance to their career a strong network of mentors and corporate sponsors who will take responsibility for directing their professional development is needed.

Purpose of the study

This study challenges the construction industry including the different stakeholders to redirect their focus to women, and to solve the problems women graduates experience in South Africa. Women contribute to the construction and that needs to be acknowledged by the industry in such a way that changes are made to suit women and in a way to accommodate their work-life balance especially now that the industry is booming with new developments in the country. Practitioners in the South African construction industry need to communicate

with women, from scholars to women in communities, in order to expose them to opportunities in the industry.

Objectives of study

- To investigate the problems women encounter in mentoring upon entering the construction industry.
- To examine career barriers of women graduates in entry level and mid-level position who are formally and informally mentored.

Literature review

Many researchers have come up with diverse conclusions when it comes to the issue of women involved in the Non-Traditional Occupations which includes construction. Schools and unemployment services often fail to discover non-traditional careers with women and girls. Not expressive all of their options, they often choose traditional female controlled careers, because they are familiar with them. Earlier to 1990, there had been a minor effort by academics to try and explain the under-representation of women graduates in the construction industry in South Africa. These problems had been insulated as being due to a number of factors including: the education practices, image of the industry, recruitment practices, sexist attitudes, organisational culture and working environment.

The perception that women belong in the kitchen has led to women being employed in traditional careers like teaching and nursing (Geertsema, 2007). This disappearing perception has been evidently confirmed by an increase in a number of women-owned construction businesses in the US, from 1992 to 1999, a growth of 68% (U.S. Census Bureau and the National Foundation for Women Business Owners). In today years, the number of women following high-ranking positions within organizations has increased. Though women have progressed in the workplace, there is still a need for gender fairness in the workplace. The increasing mobility for women graduates still remains lower and well behind male employees. There is also evidence that women face diverse barriers depending upon their level in the organization. It is often a fight for women pursuing the top jobs, due to many of the high- status jobs being dominated by men. Hence, women really need someone, for example a mentor who can coach them and assist to pull them up through the ranks. Equal after women have mounted the career ladder, oftentimes they still surface more barriers than their male colleagues. In order for women to progress and to be seen as valued assets to an organizations they have to be more smart, tougher, and out-shine the men within their organization.

In South Africa, a career in construction industry has not been a popular choice for women. A study made in Western Cape in 2002 discloses that out of 65 sites visited no single woman was involved in construction. In Singapore, more female quantity surveying graduates are encouraged to join the construction industry. It is important to attract and retain graduate women with applicable construction related qualifications and skills. If a significant number of trained professionals do not enter the industry, the standard, growth and professionalism of the industry will grieve. South Africa, USA and Singapore are some of the countries reported to knowledge the skills shortage. Inspiring women to fill this gap and acceptance by male colleagues can be one of the solutions to the problem. The main allegation for companies in the construction industry is that they need to improve the industry's image if they are to attract women graduates (Pei Poh, 2004).

Women graduates are behind and in having networks that can connect them with decision makers that lead to their progression in the workforce. For example, an interview study directed by Rebecca Heller found that women in high ranking corporate positions for example, company president testified being excepted from informal networks with male

peers (2011). As an outcome, of not being included among key networks women sensed that their performance suffered and was so prominent in their performance evaluations. The study also found that women feel that being secluded from networks limits any possible future opportunities for growth. The most mutual gender grounded barriers that women face include the following: (1) corporate policies and practices, (2) training and career development, (3) promotion policies, (4) compensation practices, (5) behavioral and cultural explanations, (6) behavioral double binds, (7) communication styles, (8) stereotypes, (9) preferred leadership styles, (10) power in corporate culture, (11) sustaining the status quo old boy networks, and minimum effort in top management circles. Overpowering barriers is a process and does not happen overnight. Protégés and mentors must allow the mentoring relationship to run its development.

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Women graduates employees, gender equality and diversity at work can make a positive guidance to organizational performance. Extensive studies have been directed on females' under-representation in the construction industry such as issues confronting women involvement in the construction industry (Radhlinah and Jingmond, 2011), professional women and career obstacles in the construction industry in Nigeria (Kehinde and Okoli, 2004), exploration of the factors influencing choices of careers in construction by South African women (Madikizela, 2008), retaining graduate women in the Singapore construction industry (Florence and Lena, 2008). These studies have measured only the views of females in relation to the challenges to their retention in the construction industry. Though, while examining factors that have accounted for the low representation of women in a male conquered working environment, it becomes essential to reflect also the sensitivities of male counterparts on the challenges opposing females the industry. The literature exposes that there is lack of information on the views of both sexes on the challenges of retaining female construction graduates in the construction industry.

Obstacles to Women Graduates Entry and Retention in the Construction Industry

The stimulating nature of the construction workplace and its influence on the careers of women has made the basis of several studies (Florence and Lena, 2008). The misunderstanding that the construction industry includes only site activities measured hazardous, unsafe, difficult and inappropriate, continues to be the main barrier to female entry into the industry (Kehinde and Okoli, 2004). Numerous studies have argued reasons why female workers are fearful from the construction industry as a whole (Radhlinah and Jingmond, 2011). Kehinde and Okoli (2004) debated that despite the historically substantial contribution of women in construction industry, during the unenlightened age and in most

rural areas of Africa, the preparation of the profession in the current era has made it difficult for women to remain effective in the construction sector. One most significant reason for women's under-representation in the construction industry is identified as lack of career advancement, referred to as "glass ceiling" (Ernest, 2003) and mentoring mechanism.

The common barriers are social receptions of employment, sexually inappropriate occupation, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, physical inability, and labour conditions such as dangerous weather, unfriendly working hours and contact to hazards. Barriers to women graduates entering and working within construction rise from, inter alia, the industry image, career knowledge among children and adults, gender prejudice recruitment practices and procedures, sexist attitudes, male subject culture, poor career advice, peer pressure and the work environment (Radhlinah and Jingmond, 2011; Madikizela, 2008; Kehinde and Okoli, 2004). The prejudice that women are physically not strong to endure tireless tasks continues to serve as a major barrier to the entry and retention of women into the construction industry. Clarke et al. (2004) absolute that when entering the gender separated occupations, potential women need to prove their competence despite their qualifications and experiences.

A critical obstacle to female graduates' retention can be attributed to the insufficient role models and mentors, family commitments, male dominance, and poor educational experiences and negative disgraces based solely on the industry's perception of women (Barbara et al., 2009). Current female entrants might have been the subject of targeted recruitment operations or had read literature specifically aimed at attracting them to the industry (Madikizela, 2008). Therefore, poor initial understanding of the culture of the industry and the fundamental difficulties of working in such a male dominated environment still remains a barrier to the entry and retention of women graduates in the industry.

Research Methodology

The study was mainly a literature review, qualitative with a special focus on women mentoring problems of employees within organizations. Based on the content analysis, and historical data. Data was collected by reviewing literature on mentoring styles, for example formal and informal mentoring and organizational rank of women graduates in entry-level and mid-management, this were compared on perceived career barriers for example lack of cultural fit, exclusion from informal networks, lack of mentoring, poor organizational management processes, difficulty getting developmental assignments, and difficulty obtaining opportunities for geographic mobility.

Findings and Discussion

Much creativity has been provided over the years to increase women's contribution in the construction industry. Though women are involved to the industry with revealing knowledge of the actual work environment of the industry, they get dissatisfied and dissatisfaction with their findings. A vital area for recruitment and retention that has been recognized by Moore (2006) is the better organization and communication between secondary schools and post-secondary construction degree programmes. Absolutely, attracting women to the construction industry begins by educating girls about possible construction careers. Wangle (2009) decided that there is the need to channel the gap between educators of second cycle institutions and the industry in order to improve the knowledge of females about the construction industry.

Problems women encounter in mentoring upon entering the construction industry

Nature of the construction industry

According to the study completed by Yeu Pei Poh (2004), female quantity surveying graduates sensed that construction jobs have a poor image and a very competitive nature and these may stop them from joining the industry after graduation. In order to retain women graduates, the construction industry initially requires a more complete understanding of women's careers and experience. This knowledge will let the industry to make informed judgements when developing human resource management policies to grow a fair and equitable work environment and thus improve graduates' retention and mentoring in the future.

Stereotyping women

When women enter a new non-traditional career path, they are confronted by society to prove their competence to work within the construction industry. The readiness is that, for example women cannot tell men on construction site to do certain work and also incapability to combine work and family responsibilities. Women are not encouraged to follow professional career in construction in the society. Nevertheless all of society's deceptive notions about work in the industry women themselves assume that if they work hard and perform well, they will be known as engineers and accepted by male colleagues. Certain cultures still focus on the inclination stereotyping women and women's incapability to break away from traditional positions like clerical and administration support. Long working hour's culture. The issue of work-life balance in relation to the perception of professional commitment which they recognize as a key factor in the side-lining of women in the professional sector. This idea has at its core the prioritizing of work as the norm, as a way of life, with other personal and family interests having to fit around this corporate work philosophy. Some researchers have indicated that international companies are in the command of a long-hour culture where employees have to show a persistent commitment to work. This results in a culture of employees being present at work so that even when there is no solid work to be done, the way to show commitment and loyalty is to stay late. The long hours linked with positions of authority are troublesome for women because of a lack of corporate-sponsored child care programmes.

Discrimination and Harassment on site

Most often the move from higher education to employment is such an enormous transition. Graduates enter the construction industry with high prospects and feelings of confidence which are likely to be balanced with a natural anxiety associated with such major change, when they see the reality of working on site. Women graduates enter the industry where patience on construction sites is not always very high and behaviour of people through words and actions are often of a rough and a violent nature. Women must learn how to effectively address and cope with violence, foul language, sexual harassment, intimidation and rejection in the construction industry. Women are not taken extremely by subordinate men, particularly older and foreign-born men (Geertsema, 2007). Women graduates need knowledge of how the industry really works. The prerequisite to know not only the theoretical, practical, technical and legal issues but also real issues like how to network on the industry with people, what to evade, who to avoid, what to do when, what not to do and when to say "NO".

Work Performance and Financial Support

According to the study conducted by (Geertsema,2007), work performance required from women is observed as being higher than for men, which grounds women who want challenge

in the workplace to enter the construction industry to contest with men. With all the confidence women graduates have from the university, they are still compensated less than their male colleagues. This theory is reinforced by the study piloted by Bowen, Cattell and Distiller, (2008) where female quantity surveyors confirmed that they are compensated at a lower level than equivalent colleagues. Women are expected to be secure and content with the lower wages they earn in the industry. In comparison, there is absolutely salutation of the work done in a fair system by South African Labour Laws. Women are further likely today to be accepted into the construction industry and receive a compensation package that reflects their employment prestige.

Motivation

Researchers concluded that maximum of women do not get motivation and support from their families and friends to enter the industry. Those who are studying towards construction careers are a little encouraged compared to matriculants who do not have an idea about the construction industry. Some school students, undergraduates and career counsellors said that they were unhappy at the idea of women being hunted because of shortages. They often precise this as an ethical or moral issue. In comparison, the study directed by Geertsema in 2007 shows that women are motivated by different factors or possessions to enter the construction industry.

Career barriers of women graduates in entry level and mid-level position who are formally and informally mentored

The dissimilarities between formal and informal mentoring relationships and which style of mentoring is more effective in contesting protégés'observed career barriers. Researchers propose that the main differences between formal and informal mentoring are based on the construction of the relationship (Inzer, 2005) . Though, due to the assumed positive impact that formal mentoring is reflected to have on protégés, many companies are employing formal mentoring programs. As a result, protégés may not reflect seeking out an individual and emerging an informal mentoring relationship. Protégés need to know that informal mentoring is a choice to ponder when a formal mentoring relationship is not reciprocal and there is not agreement on the career development route. Meanwhile females have a difficult time finding quality formal mentors, informal should be absolutely be taken into thoughtfulness. (Gilmore et al. 2005) proposed that informal mentoring relationships are established through relations of senior and junior level employees as well as informal networking opportunities outside the workplace. Research piloted by. Inzer (2005) recommended that unassigned mentoring relationships, for example, informal mentoring were more effective than assigned mentoring relationships, formal mentoring. The dissimilarity of effectiveness between the two styles of mentoring was mainly accredited to the level of commitment between both the protégé and mentor. In informal mentoring relationships the equal of commitment is higher than in formal mentoring relationships (Gilmore et al. 2005). The development of informal mentoring relationships generally involves of mutual respect by both parties as well as similar goals for example, long-term career development as they relate to career development. The extent of informal mentoring relationships is long-term, lasting 3 to 6 years if not longer (Inzer, 2005). Subsequently informal mentoring relationships are long-term there are greater learning opportunities as well as continuous guidance for protégés as they mature professionally. In distinction, formal mentoring relationships last between 6 months and 1 year and the goals are typically short-term and more focused on the current. Due to time limit restrictions there is very little room for psychosocial development functions for the protégé in formal mentoring relationships (Inzer, 2005).

Informal mentoring relationships contain mutual feelings of trust, respect and caring; while, formal mentoring relationships are said to be less compassionate (Foster and MacLeod, 2004)). Formal mentoring relationships generally beheld as being compulsory, which in many cases has proven to be ineffective in offering protégé confident functions such as guidance and exposure, which are needed in order to have a successful mentoring relationship (Foster and MacLeod, 2004). For example, organizations will pair mentees with mentors from dissimilar departments within the organization. Relationships that are compulsory or assigned by force, can cause both the protégé and mentor to show dissatisfaction, anger, resentment and disbelief during the mentoring process in an organization. In the procedure of developing a protégé, mentors also support in helping the protégé overcome barriers or challenges to progression. Research recommends that protégés experience three mutual behaviors from mentors: (1) career development, (2) social support, and (3) role modeling (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007), which are essential in order for mentoring to support in disabling career barriers. Apart from common behaviors that mentor's display there are two main areas that mentoring is reflected to focus on: (1) career-related functions and (2) psychosocial functions (Douglas, 1997). The career-related functions emphasis more on protégés' progression within a particular organization (Inzer, 2005); whereas, psychosocial functions compact with protégés' personal growth and professional development (Douglas, 1997). Career barriers can be ordered into two main categories; internal for example, personality and attribute variables and external, situational and structural variables. The internal barriers are linked with certain roles and behaviors that society has placed on men and women in the employees. For example, according to culture, characteristics associated with being a manager mainly drops under male roles and behaviors. Due to this, numerous females are depressed about their progression opportunities. Though, there are characteristics normally linked with women, such as being people-oriented that are careful to be important in management positions. In dissimilarity, the roles and jobs assigned to women in the workplace are related with personality characters, motivational needs, and behavior forms that are not common among most managers and other high-ranking positions (Douglas, 1997). As an outcome of most leadership roles being definite as male, it presents problems for women progressing their careers (Jogulu, 2008). Research displays that women in male-dominated roles often receive negative response from society and from their peers (Jogulu, 2008). According to (Douglas, 1997) effects of women into management roles. External factors are large barriers females surface when seeking to advance in the workforce and even more so when females wish to be a part of management. Women who hold upper level positions within an organization are more inclined to stress than men because they have often have to maintain double roles, for example managing work in an organization and family demands. It is not top secret that women in the workforce are confronted to maintain a balanced life between duties at home and responsibilities at work. A portion of women find it difficult to do so. As an outcome, they have to undertake part-time jobs when they have difficult family roles for example, children. Because of double roles women sometimes have to moderate their time in the workplace. The research is devastating supports that in the workforce most jobs are allocated and viewed by gender roles (Woytek et al., 2013). As an outcome, women are often unnoticed due to role struggle and stereotypes. Certain career barriers that women understand will lay inactive without the help of a mentor. One of the essential barriers women face when trying to climb the career ladder is limited access to mentoring and less effective mentoring than male colleagues. Career barriers are often greater for women than men in the workplace. Though, with the help of mentoring, women can overcome many of the career barriers they face among other glass-ceiling's special effects. Mentoring is a powerful tool for professional development and can be used to stunned barriers. Regardless of the outcomes and successes related to mentoring, there are

still incomplete opportunities for women to be mentored. Some of the reasons for women having limited access to a mentor and or lack of willingness to mentor women are concern that, others for example, colleagues would not reflect the relationships appropriate or misunderstand a mentorship approach as a sensual development or sexual harassment of female employees. While there is supporting evidence that individuals progress up the ranks faster from experiencing mentoring, women are slow to pursue out mentors because they are not happy asking fellow women for help or because mentors are not available to them (Metros and Yang, 2006).

Conclusion

As the employees and the nature of jobs continues to transform, it is important to understand the impact that these changes will have on individual's career routes, especially women. In current years, the ratio of women in leading roles has moved more and more women are getting mentoring, specialized professional training in the workplace. Even though some barriers still exist for women such as the gap in wages between men and women, main gains have been made by women in executive, administration, and managerial occupations. Mentoring has been known as a tried and true 'procedure in assisting women in advancing in high positions. As an outcome, women should take advantage of mentoring opportunities in order to increase their successes not only the employees, but also their personal lives. Women must remain hard-working in avoiding career barriers and be committed to the mentoring process in order to truly reap the benefits of mentoring and to see a positive change in their lives. More research had been done to name a few, on experienced women and entrepreneurs in the construction industry but a number of research on women graduates, has not been well researched. Women experience similar problems but these problems have dissimilar impacts on "the new entry" and "the old" women. Women graduates are expected to enter the industry and practice in their profession but doing so is made problematic firstly, by lack of encouragement and support on site to contribute in their profession, and the under-representation of graduates because of their lack of experience. Construction employers value experience more than qualification which puts women graduates on a undesirable side in the construction employment and development. New entry women graduates experience the difficulty of adapting in the aggressive working environment where there is rude language and it might take time for workers to follow instructions given by young inexperienced women. A fair representation of women on construction sites can be achieve by increasing the output of women graduates in the field of construction and increasing opportunity of mentoring and learner ships.

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