# An exploratory study on mentoring in the South African construction industry

**Abstract:**
Mentoring is important for all young employees entering the workplace. Despite the growing research on both sets of individuals, mentors and proteges, mentoring from the perspective of the organizational remains comparatively under reported. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of mentoring in the construction industry.Further more it will identify the drawbacks, benefits and examine future prospects of formal mentoring in medium sized and large organisations in South African construction industy. The paper focuses on how organisations view mentoring. The study was mainly a literature review with a special focus on formal mentoring. The data used in the report was mainly qualitative, based on the, case studies and historical data. The review is into formal mentoring of young employees entering the work place. The scope of this review is confined to the literature that discusses formal mentoring internal to the workplace which support on and off job learning. The results revealed the organisation current situation and the issues that are important to the HR function. Mentoring is primarily used to transfer tacit knowledge from those near retirement to younger employees, foster the personel development and create well being at work. Career advancement and work performance are not as impotant as might have been thought. Young employees, in particular may demand the use of social media, along side mentoring.

**Keywords**:
Construction Industry, Formal Mentoring, Human Resource Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Many large and medium sized organizations institute a system of mentoring where an experienced worker passes on her knowledge and expertise to a less experienced worker. In some circumstances, a mentor may be assigned by management or a mentoring relationship may occur in an informal manner. While mentoring can offer many advantages, some possible drawbacks merit your attention. The young employees of today are the future business leaders of tomorrow As generations age the more experienced workers leave the company to younger employees, young graduates entering the workplace after, completing their degrees in higher institutions of learning, who take their place, but with such a large generation such as the Baby Boomers. Young people graduate employees are armed with academic knowledge and enthusiasm, however, many people quickly realize that they lack the skills required to navigate and succeed in a corporate environment. More and more businesses are embracing the concept of mentoring as a professional development tool. Through mentoring, large and medium

organizations are seeing dramatic improvements in efficiency, productivity and, of course, the passing of institutional knowledge and leadership skills from one generation to the next. Mentoring concepts and mentoring research have traditionally emphasised the benefits of mentoring from the point-of-view of the prote´ge´ (Allen et al., 1997). More recent perspectives in contrast, tend to treat mentoring as something beneficial for both mentors and prote´ge´s (Ragins and Verbos, 2007). Furthermore, despite the growing research on both sets of individuals, mentors and prote´ge´s, mentoring from the perspective of the large and medium organisation remains comparatively under reported.

The employing organisation is, however, a relevant third party in any mentoring relationship (Wilson and Elman, 1990). It seems practical to suggest that an organization benefits from all kinds of mentoring, but when a mentoring programme is established by an organisation, it sets certain goals for the programme (Stone, 2004), and therefore the potential benefits of mentoring are higher than in the case of individually driven mentoring. In totaling, when mentoring is provided by an organisation, the importance of recognising the possible benefits and avoiding the drawbacks becomes especially critical. Though, far too little attention has been paid to the benefits and drawbacks of mentoring from the large and medium sized organisation's point-of-view. A growing body of academic and practitioner literature supports the popular perception that mentoring has considerable value to both individual employees and organizations.

Human resource management literature and (HR) professionals were chosen to be the informers in the study, because formal mentoring is categorised as one of the human resource development (HRD) practices in organisations (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008), being large or medium sized and therefore HR professionals are assumed to be the most capable of providing information on mentoring in their organisation (Stone, 2004). Furthermore, prior research has shown that HR professionals and the HR department of an organisation will be involved when a formal mentoring programme is recognized in an organisation (Hirschfeld et al., 2006). The research to date has inclined to focus on informal mentoring (Ragins et al., 2000), which is, at least to some extent, likely to occur in every organisation without organisational representatives necessarily being aware of it. While acknowledging that it might be difficult to draw a clear line between formal and informal mentoring in an organisation, the authors restrict the scope of the study to mentoring as a formal practice, as this seems to be the most balanced way to approach the target phenomenon from the organisation's point-of-view. The selected approach adds to a small body of empirical research on organisational perspectives by providing widespread insight into mentoring practice and its perceived benefits and drawbacks. Additional, since the benefits organisations derive from mentoring are not as widely known or understood as the benefits for mentors and prote´ge´s, an organisation wanting to introduce mentoring may find it useful to contemplate how mentoring may be successful.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of mentoring in the construction industry.

This study will meaningfully contributes by sharing the wisdom and knowledge of transition to retirement employees to ensure corporate knowledge does not simply walk

out the door, sharing the collective wisdom and knowledge of the build environment business, linking the corporate and not for profit sectors in a cost effective and meaningful way to share skills, knowledge , and experiences., it will help to steer the course of cultural or other forms of change in an organization through the use of peer mentoring circles for frontline managers responsible for change, connecting different generations in the business an improving understanding of intergenerational nuisances. Research has shown that individual characteristics such as personality are strong predictors of job-related attitudes and performance (Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010), such factors can't be acted on in an HRD capacity. The organization can, however, alter its human resources activities (i.e., its mentoring both formal and informal and other developmental offerings). A better understanding of benefits and drawbacks would help large and medium sized organisations maximise positive outcomes and minimise the negative effects of mentoring.

Objective of the study

- To identify the benefits and drawbacks of mentoring from the large and medium sized organisation's perspective.
- To examine the future prospects of formal mentoring in the large and medium sized organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring is usually a formal or informal relationship between two people a senior mentor (usually outside the protégé's chain of supervision) and a junior protégé. Mentoring has been identified as an important influence in professional development in both the public and private sector in large and medium sized organizations. Mentoring as a form of strategic human resource management is an interesting addition to the HRD literature because it provides a mechanism of change for individual employees, within construction organizations. Having a powerful human resource development (HRD) organization is a worthwhile asset of companies, and an enterprise's efficiency is closely connected to human capital's managerial and developmental systems (Latagana, Dinu & Stoica, 2010). Human capitals play an important role in order to success an organization.

Mentoring is one of the oldest forms of influence and knowledge sharing. It started with the Ancient Greeks; Mentor was Odysseus' trusted counsellor and advisor. Mentoring is when one individual actively and willingly passes his/or knowledge and wisdom onto another person. A Mentor is an individual, usually older, but always more experienced- who helps and guides another individual's development. This guidance is done without the expectation of personal or monetary gain on the mentor's part. Mentoring is about skill development and specialized knowledge transfer. When done correctly, it's a powerful double whammy (Abbajay, 2007). Mentoring has been used for centuries as a way of helping younger protégés to advance, and, according to Darwin (2000) mentoring is presently at the forefront of strategies to improve workplace learning. Harris *et al.* (2001:274) argue that "workplace mentoring is the most critical factor in worksite learning".

Within the government and the private sector, mentoring is often a component of different types of development, including graduates career development and training programs in large and medium sized organizations. The major function of mentoring within these programs is to promote the protégé's development in specific areas and to facilitate successful completion of the program. While these mentoring relationships can produce positive developmental and organizational outcomes, both mentoring programs and relationships sometimes fail due to a diversity of causes and problems, for example lack of participation, no leadership involvement, poor planning, unrealistic expectations, and unclear goals. Today mentoring is commonly used in professional and managerial learning, but is relatively new as a means of supporting low paid trainees and apprentices doing certificate level qualifications. Mentoring is planned early intervention designed to provide timely instruction to mentees throughout their apprenticeship, to shorten the learning curve, reinforce positive work ethics and attitudes, and provide mentees with role models (Hipes and Marinoni, 2005). The functionalist definition involves hierarchical process of support for limited purposes such as changing the mentee to suit the employing organization or the industry. An older mentor assists a younger. It focuses on instruction, learning and attitudes. There is no overt statement about the relationship between the mentor and mentee.

Mentoring in the construction industry

Mentoring is a key element in construction work (Rogers, 2007). For example, it is very common on construction jobsites to have experienced workers, who oversee and mentor less experienced workers. However, the relationship between a mentor and his/her prote´ge´ in the construction industry may be different from the mentoring relationships typically observed in other industries, due to constantly changing work environment and crews, diverse and rapid tasks, and the short-term relationships that prote´ge´s have with their mentors (Ringen *et al.,* 1995). Jobs in the construction industry can last from a few days to a few years, so the length of any mentor-prote´ge´.

Mentoring in an organisation may be informal or formal. Earlier research suggests that it is not necessarily easy to distinguish between the two. The definition of Ragins et al. (2000), designates the difference as follows, In order to assist individuals in their development and advancement, some organisations have recognized formal mentoring programs, where prote´ge´s and mentors are linked in some way. This may be accomplished by assisting mentors or by just providing formal opportunities aimed at developing the relationship. To review, formal mentoring programs are developed with organizational assistance. Informal mentoring relationships are developed spontaneously, without organisational assistance.

This is reliable with Chao et al. (1992), who mention that the basic distinction between formal and informal mentoring is in the formation of the relationship. Thus, in distinction to a formal mentoring relationship, informal mentorship is not managed, structured, nor formally recognised by the organisation (Chao et al., 1992). Further, the formal relationship is established for a certain period of time for example, (nine months to a year) and is more target-oriented than any informal relationship (Wanberg et al., 2006). Formal mentoring programs are usually supplemented with training and coaching of participants (Wilson and Elman, 1990; Stone, 2004), include recognized goals, feature

meeting between the programme coordinator and participants, and evaluation and feedback (Stone, 2004).

Once a graduate leaves an educational institution he or she studied at, they enter the work place as an educated graduate. However, one tends to forget that having the theoretical background/ knowledge only prepares one slightly for the work place. The practical experience a graduate lacks is what needs to be developed and explored. Often companies expect great results from mere graduates in the work place because they forget that graduates are merely armed with basic theoretical principles. Although it is up to the graduate, it is more so to the employer's benefit to mentor and coach this graduate in the working environment. Yes, this will entail time, effort and cost from the employer, but in the long term the employer will have a qualified graduate who can operate on his own and produce very positive outcomes, both for him/ herself and the employer. Over the last 10 to 15 years businesses have altered their perspective on mentoring and coaching of employees. Many businesses have realised that an on-going coaching and or mentoring program, integrated into an organization's operation and supported by its employees, is an efficient and cost effective way to build and keep a qualified, enthusiastic and productive staff (CRM Learning, 2000).

One benefit of formal mentoring over its informal complement is its more official role in the organisation. In significance, it is more acceptable to use working hours for mentoring activity (Allen et al., 1997). In accumulation, a formal mentoring programme with a clearly defined purpose usually has senior management support (Stone, 2004), and therefore the potential benefits of mentoring from the organisation's point of view are greater than in the case of informal mentoring. On the other hand, formal mentoring may work for only short-term and confined goals, for example, to help to make some career decision or manage some day to day work challenges (Eby and Lockwood, 2005).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly a literature review with a special focus on formal mentoring current situation and the prospects for the future. The data used in the report is mainly qualitative, based on the content analysis, case studies and historical data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Future prospects of formal mentoring in large and medium sized organizations

The construction industry has been considered to be one of the most dynamic and complex industrial environments (Druker, White, Hegewisch, & Mayne, 1996). It is a project based industry within which individual projects are usually custom built to client specifications (Loosemore, Dainty, & Lingard, 2003) . The dynamic environment and changing demands of construction activities required the formation of the teams each time a new project is commenced with a new client. This is particularly appeared in larger contractor companies, which are focused on managing the construction phases and the processes with a few directly employed construction managers, site agents and

professional staff in order to lead the outsource teams . Most importantly, however, the external sources of workforces are very common in the industry (Loosemore, Dainty, & Lingard, 2003). Whilst the increasing use of external sources of labour has allowed the managing contractors to pass on risk and achieve greater flexibility, it has also made employee development and project coordination more complex, with a requirement for more highly skilled and experienced management (Loosemore, Dainty, & Lingard, 2003). Despite these challenging characteristics of the industry, literature on HRD within large construction organisations is scarce and much of the evidence relies on data gathered over last decades (Druker,et al. 1996).

Raiden et al.( 2001), found that the companies demonstrated significant commitment toward strategic HRD with the benefits of staff retention and improved organizational performance. Staff retention is a problem in the construction companies as young employees are job hopping, due to exposure to new opportunities and greener pastures to some other organizations. On the other hand, the success of an organization, particularly a construction organization, is largely dependent upon the quality and morale of its people (Clough, et al. 2000). HRD provides an influential approach to the development of employees in many business sectors, including the construction industry. In this regard, the construction industry, however, presents a challenging environment for the effective management and development of human resources due to the dynamic and fast changing organizational, project and skill requirements.

More and more organizations are creating formal mentoring programs for various reasons. From increased morale to increased organizational productivity and career development, the benefits of an organization that actively supports mentoring are many. However, successful mentoring programs do not just happen. Organizations must first make a strong business case to establish why the organization should dedicate the time, attention and resources required to make a formal mentoring process work. Reasons for forming a mentoring program must be connected to the organization's business goals. For example, an organization forecasting incredible growth in a specific job series may want a mentoring program to help prepare high potential employees for future managerial positions in that succession planning. Also, an organization planning a reorganization may be interested in a mentoring program to help simplify continuity of organizational performance. Listed below are some reasons why organizations choose to establish mentoring programs.

- **As quantity of the Onboarding process -** mentoring helps new recruits, trainees or employee graduates settle into the organization.

- **Skills Enhancement** - mentoring allows experienced, highly competent staff to pass their expertise on to others who need to attain specified skills.

- **Professional Identity** - when younger graduates employees are early in their careers, they need help understanding what it means to be a professional in their working environment. Professionals embody the values of the profession and are self beginning and self-regulating. Mentors play a key role in defining professional behavior for new graduates employees. This is most important when employees first enter the workplace.

- **Career Development** - mentoring helps employees plan, develop, and manage their careers. It also helps them become more resistant in times of change, more independent in their careers and more responsible as self-directed learners.

- **Leadership and Management Development** - mentoring encourages the development of leadership competencies. These competencies are often more easily gained through example, directed practice or experience than by education and training only.

- **Education Support** - mentoring helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. Formal education and training is complemented by the knowledge and hands on experience of a competent expert.

- **Organizational Development and Culture Change** - mentoring can help communicate the values, vision and mission of the large and medium sized organizations, a one-to-one relationship can help employees understand the organizational culture and make any compulsory changes.

- **Staff retention** - mentoring provides an encouraging environment through ongoing interactions, coaching, teaching, and role modeling that simplifies progression within the organization; mentoring has been found to influence employee retention because it helps establish an organizational culture that is attractive to the top talent appealing for growth opportunities. Mentoring is a tangible way to show employees that they are valued and that the company's future includes them.

- **Recruitment** - mentoring can improve recruitment goals by offering additional incentives to prospective employees and

- **Knowledge Management or Knowledge Transfer** - mentoring provides for the interchange or exchange of information or knowledge between members of different organizations.

Benefits and drawbacks of formal mentoring in large and medium sized organizations

It becomes difficult to discuss the benefits of mentoring in large and medium sized organizations, because formal and informal mentoring can be experienced quite differently. The role of the mentor, too, can vary extremely. For example, the strength of the emotional relationship between mentor and protégé described by Levinson et al. (1978) is not usually a characteristic of formal mentoring relationships where a senior mentor is usually assigned a junior mentee in the organisation for a short period of time to teach the junior into the culture, norms and processes of the organisation. Mentoring of young employees is a way senior employees can help drive success of a corporation or an initiative. Young employees graduate from academic institutions armed with academic knowledge and enthusiasm. However, many people quickly realize that they lack the skills required to navigate and succeed in a corporate environment. When employees of different generations need to work together on projects, there is the potential for an unhealthy rivalry and a contentious relationship. The young employee may feel the mature employee is stuck in their ways and unwilling to try an alternative, and the mature

employee sees the youthful exuberance as flighty and undisciplined. When a mentor sponsors an employee, they form a professional bond that should leave a lasting impression on both parties. Mentoring is a great way for senior employees to help the future leaders of tomorrow, and provides a way to give back to the organization. Through the sponsorship of a mentor, the protégée should receive increased visibility and exposure within the organization, the mentor can serve as an important role by sharing experiences with the protégée.

This allows young employees the ability to learn from mistakes of others. The protégée receives all the benefits without making the same, possibly career limiting, mistakes. The mentor can provide critical insights to the organization and help the young read and sense the events going on around them. This helps the young employee recognize opportunities and avoid career limiting mistakes. Succeeding in an established corporate environment is not easy. Young employees with an ambition to climb the corporate and make the most of their professional opportunities need to learn how to succeed. The mentor is normally a seasoned veteran who can provide a road map on how they and other successful employees climbed the corporate ladder. Young employees are valuable organizational resources, the organization that provide leadership and mentoring to young employees can receive great dividends from time spent with them.

Numerous positive individual outcomes may be expected from mentoring. Mentoring is usually divided into three separate, but related dimensions, which are career development, psychosocial support and role modelling (Scandura, 1997). Younger prote´ge´s are more likely to receive more role modelling than older ones (Finkelstein et al., 2003), and increased respect for a mentor as a role model may noticeable itself in the prote´ge´’s positive attitude to work (Scandura, 1997). Mentoring has also been suggested to be one important tool that can help women break through the glass ceiling (Ragins et al., 1998). Earlier research has revealed that mentoring has an effect on promotions (Whitely and Coetsier, 1993) and is positively related to career expectations (Underhill, 2006). Moreover, mentoring is positively connected with organisational commitment (Scandura, 1997), job satisfaction ( Scandura,1997), and it is positively related to personal well-being (Whitely and Coetsier, 1993) and self-esteem and moderates the effect of work-family conflict ( Underhill, 2006). Additionally, feedback from mentors can help prote´ge´s in decision-making and problem-solving (Whitely and Coetsier, 1993).

When a young employee becomes the protégée of a mentor, many benefits will the protégée assimilate easier into the corporate culture. The young emplo yee will have a quicker and easier transition into the organizational workforce. Structured mentorship offers various benefits. According to Marsh (2012:6) these benefits can either be directed towards the organisation or the individual within the organisation. Marsh goes further by listing the following organisational benefits:

- Increased ability to attract, develop, motivate and retain quality employees.
- Improvement of succession planning and talent management within the organisation.
- Retention and sharing of critical business knowledge and intellectual capital.

- Enhancement and transfer of scares skills
- Improve employee productivity and lastly
- Enhance employee engagement within the organisation

The list formulated by Stone (2004) demonstrates this by suggesting major reasons why organisations establish mentoring programs. Most of them relate to HRD for example, the desire to accelerate the development of top performers, or to supplement or replace leadership training with a mentoring programme, or the desire to close skill and ability gaps of existing staff members. Murray and Owen (1991) recognize several benefits of formal mentoring programs for the organisation. Some of these include increased productivity, improved recruitment efforts, motivation of senior people, improvement of services offered by the organisation and enhancement in strategic and succession planning. An important benefit which was identified earlier in the paper for mentees is the development of skills and knowledge necessary for carrying out the role. It is evident that organisations can only benefit by developing their employees' abilities and work performance. Some of these benefits are :

The development of managers or workers who can carry out the work effectively is one of the benefits of mentoring for the organisation. Induction is a highly appropriate means of developing employees which enables them to understand the new and competing demands of the position.

Increased commitment has also been identified as a benefit for the organisation. Fagan (1988) found that police officers who were mentored had higher job satisfaction, a stronger work ethic and less of an age/experience gap with their mentors than those who had not been mentored. Two of these findings suggest strong commitment and loyalty to the organisation. The final benefit to the organisation that is discussed here is improved organisational communication. This is said to occur because mentors and mentees share knowledge and information regarding important matters in the organisation (Antal, 1993). A study by Geiger-Dumond and Boyle (1995) of a formal one year long mentoring program found that improved communication at senior and junior levels was one of the successes of the program.

Drawbacks

Murphy (1996) in a study of middle aged male mentors classifies benefits that can be associated with mentoring. However, he also talks about the 'shadow side' of mentoring and uses such brands as 'the pain of fractured trust', 'the pain of letting go' and 'the pain of disappointment'. Douglas (1997) supports the views of Long (1997) and Murphy (1996) and suggests that much of the literature is one-sided and only focuses on the posetive aspects of mentoring. Murray and Owen (1991) also debate what they see as the potential challenges or negative aspects of formal mentoring. The first issue they discuss is the operation of a mentoring program when there are few opportunities for advancement within an organisation. In the opinion of these authors, a situation such as this can lead to obstruction for the mentees. The second issue raised by Murray and Owen (1991) is the danger of permitting a mentoring program to proceed when there is not complete organisational commitment to the program. Thirdly, they direct concern about

organisations that have encountered difficulties in endeavouring to organize existing ongoing training or human resource programs with new mentoring programs. The fourth point raised by Murray and Owen (1991) is the potential difficulty to influence management to implement a mentoring program when there is a relative lack of solid data moderating the effectiveness of such programs. The fifth and final issue raised is the difficulty and potential expensive administration related with a mentoring program that includes cross-functional pairing.

From the prote´ge´'s point-of-view, a negative mentoring experience can branch from a dysfunctional relationship with the mentor (Simon and Eby, 2003), which easily leads to unmet prospects, carelessness and structural separation (Eby and Lockwood, 2005). Overall, mentor-prote´ge´ mismatches and inadequate relationships seem to be the most established problems in mentoring for both mentors and prote´ge´s (Eby and Lockwood, 2005). Seeing the organisational perspective, there is a risk that mentoring that is focused on career development support will upturn organisational turnover. Hall and Smith (2009) found that career development support is positively associated with psychological empowerment, which, in turn, is positively associated with an aim to leave the organisation.Taken as a whole, the earlier studies designate that mentoring practices bargain several benefits and have some drawbacks for the mentor, prote´ge´ and organisation. Though, relatively little focus has been located on the organisational side, thus this study pursues the views of HR-specialists on formal mentoring in medium-sized and large organisations.

Table 1

Drawbacks of mentoring programs

| ORGANIZATION | MENTEE OR PROTEGE | MENTOR |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of organizational support | Neglect of core job | Lack of time |
| Creation of climate of dependency | Negative experiences | Lack of perceived benefits |
| Difficulties in coordinating programs with organisational initiatives | Unrealistic experiences<br><br>Over dependence on the mentoring relationship | Lack of skills needed for the mentoring role<br><br>Pressure to take on mentoring role |
| Costs and resources associated with overseeing and administering programs | Role conflict between boss and mentor | Resentment of mentees |
| | | |

Source: Douglas, 1997

## Conclusion

In this paper the authors have endeavoured to explain the concept of mentoring by providing an analysis of the term, the types of mentoring and the potential benefits and concerns that have been reported in the mentoring literature. Human resource managers must be aware that mentoring is not an organisational solution. There are concerns regarding the outcomes of mentoring, but it is our opinion that these can be minimised by careful implementation planning. Mentoring is a complex and delicate organisational process and there is little doubt it can be a critical force for organisations, the mentors and the mentees. The results suggest that mentoring is currently rather widely used. The larger the organisation the more often it uses mentoring as a formal practice. This is probably because large organisations on the whole have more formal HR practices than smaller organisations and more resources to invest in establishing such things as mentoring programmes (Hill and Stewart, 2000).

The study reveal the organisations' current situation, and the issues that are important to the HR function. In the context of mentoring these issues are the ageing employees, and the transferral of tacit knowledge, learning and well-being. Most HR specialists account that the role of mentoring will change in the future, and the practice will be promoted more than it is currently. This is because as more of the employees retire, the transfer of tacit knowledge becomes more demanding. The simple implication of this paper is that organisations should view mentoring as a potentially beneficial process that requires careful long term planning and skilful human resource leadership. The researcher would recommend to all companies to invest in a coaching and/ or mentoring programme, preferably one that will work for that specific business. Organizations need to research other programs, talk to other executives and find the one that fits the company; the programme needs to be flexible and inclusive when matching the mentor and protégée.

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