

Assessment of Mentoring of Construction Workers in the South African Construction Industry: A Literature Review

Morena. Nkomo, and Wellington. Thwala

Abstract—It is important to critically analyze the concept and to highlight the distinctive elements of youth mentoring, in the construction industry. The aim of this paper is to look at the experiences, challenges and problems contributing to mentoring of young graduate's construction employees within construction companies. It will indicate whether or not young graduates' construction workers are they being mentored or not, are they involved in any form of mentoring, within their construction companies. This study will examine mentoring of young graduates within organizations, whether they are being mentored or not in the construction industry, as compared to their non-mentored employees; within their companies, it will look at the important characteristics of mentors, potential negative outcomes or problems in mentoring of young graduates and the implications of cultural divide in relation to gender and race, are they being mentored the same or not, this will report more job and career satisfaction, and express lower turnover than their non-mentored counterparts, furthermore it will examine the ways in which mentoring contributes to producing motivated young construction workers within the industry.

Keywords—Construction Industry, youth mentoring, young graduate's construction workers

I. INTRODUCTION

MENTORING is now a key element within national and local strategies for working with young people, especially those who are regarded as 'socially excluded [1]. As yet, few systematic evaluations of youth mentoring have taken place in UK to enable comparisons to be made between projects and with other forms of youth intervention, in this case young graduate's construction workers. Thus, some groups of young people are frequently constructed as a threat rather than as a resource for the future [2], meaning giving more information to the young people, knowledge transfer, they will know more than their mentors. This can be a black or white group. Although it is only recently that mentoring has become a feature of social policy, people were not aware of it;

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it is an idea that has been around for a considerable period of time. Mentoring can also be used as a mechanism to communicate with those employees that are not open, in regard to their performance, to break down the ice in an employee.

According to the Council for Scientific Institute of Research [6], research report in South Africa, indicated that the absence of mentors and mentoring is an impediment to progress, advancement in the country in mentoring, meaning new development in the subject. The young person is constructed as in deficit – lacking skills, appropriate socialization, lacking appropriate parenting and subject to peer pressure. Nevertheless evaluations of mentoring have pointed to the lack of knowledge held by middle class mentors about the realities of growing up in impoverished circumstances [7]. Thus this study is of important for the construction industry young graduates' construction workers.

II. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are to look at the experiences, challenges and problems contributing to mentoring of young graduate's construction employees within construction companies.

- To investigate the mentoring of young graduates construction workers within organizations, whether they are being mentored or not.
- To determine the important characteristics of mentor's, potential negative outcomes or problems in mentoring young graduates.
- To investigate the implications of cultural divide in relation to gender and race, are they being mentored the same or not.
- To examine the ways in which mentoring benefits contributes to producing motivated young construction workers within the industry.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly a literature review with a special focus on the human resource management and leadership, the data used in the report is mainly qualitative, based on the content analysis, case studies and historical data. The type of historical data used is secondary sources, running records and recollections. The study focused on the most common

problems, experiences and challenges on mentoring of young graduate's construction employees, which will indicate whether or not young graduate's construction workers are they being mentored or not, are they involved in any form of mentoring.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS

Mentoring can be defined as a developmental and supportive relationship between a senior, more experienced employee and a junior, less experienced employee [12]. Mentoring has been associated with salary increase and promotion [13], higher job satisfaction and self-respect [14], and higher organizational commitment [16]. The above findings have highlighted the need to identify the characteristics that are necessary to be an effective mentor.

Due to its dynamic nature and complex organization of work, the construction industry is different from other industries [21], particularly from typical white-collar jobs. Past research has suggested mentoring as a key component of construction work and has recognized the need for mentoring programs to develop leaders in the construction industry [22].

Considering that the construction industry plays a major role in national economies [23], and its trade training is primarily built upon a mentorship model for apprentices [24], the present study attempts to identify what constitutes an effective mentor from the perspective of construction professionals. Finding the answer to the above question is critical to the success of any mentoring program, as it can guide program developers in their decisions about whom to target, what content to include, and the methods needed to develop competent and effective mentors in the construction industry. In this study, we systematically identified and examined a list of characteristics that distinguished good from average and poor mentors in the construction industry, drawing on mentoring, coaching, and emotional intelligence literatures.

One of the objectives of this study is to determine the important characteristics of mentors in the construction industry, to examine the ways in which mentoring benefits contributes to producing young motivated workers. In the following section, we discuss the definition and benefits of mentoring. Then, we review past research literature on mentoring characteristics and the role of mentoring in the construction industry.

V. DEFINITION AND BENEFITS OF MENTORING

The word "mentor" and the concept of mentoring date back to Greek mythology, when Odysseus entrusted his son, Telemachus, to a close friend, who would oversee not only his professional development but also his personal and social growth [26].

Mentoring has been positively associated with many career and psychosocial outcomes [15]. For example, people participating in informal mentorships reported more career-related support, higher salaries, and higher job satisfaction

than those who had no mentoring relationships. In their meta-analysis, [14] also found positive associations between mentorship and job and pay satisfaction. In another recent meta-analysis, individuals who had been mentored felt more respect from their co-workers, had a more positive self-image, and felt less work stress and work-family conflict [15]. In addition, mentored individuals tend to feel more job security and have more positive perceptions of procedural and distributive justice than non-mentored individuals [28]. Research has also examined the benefits of having a mentoring program in an organization. The existence of a formal mentoring program is now being used as a criterion for determining the "Best Companies to Work For [29]. Consistent with this, Allen and O'Brien [30] found that job seekers are more attracted to organizations that have formal mentoring programs compared to those that do not have them.

Mentoring is particularly useful within the context of the Employment Equity and Skills Development legislation. Due to the inequality of the South African managerial profile, the reality is that the majority of managers are white and the majority of employees are black. In order to change this profile, transfers of skills are essential and this is exactly where mentoring can play an important role. In fact, without effective mentoring most companies will struggle to achieve their employment equity targets. The value of mentoring lies in the fact that mentoring is the quickest way to transfer skills and thereby accelerating empowerment in the workplace. No amount of formal training and informal courses can achieve what mentoring can do. With mentoring a member of a designated group targeted for a higher-level position can work with a mentor to acquire the skills needed to function at a more senior level. A mentor's role is twofold: firstly, to provide career development opportunities such as coaching, providing challenging assignments, sponsoring advancement, and fostering the protégé's visibility; secondly they provide psychosocial support such as counselling, support and role modelling. Without a mentor, an individual will learn less, more slowly or not at all.

Mentoring is, however, not an all-or-nothing relationship, and neither is it static in nature. Some or all of the roles may be provided, and they change since the purpose of the relationship is to enable the mentee to acquire new knowledge, skills and standards of competence. Mentoring also helps the organization to achieve a broad spectrum of goals, from sharing business information to developing a line of succession to replacing top management. Such purpose should be aligned to the strategic equity and skill development goals of the organization. The purpose of the programme could be aimed at removing barriers to development and advancement. This in turn will lead to more equitable people development practices, assists with career progression, leadership development, and fast tracking of high flyers (candidates who genuinely have the psychological capacity to progress very fast given a guided challenge is available to tackle).

VI. MENTORING IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Mentoring is a key element in construction work. 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 protégé 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 protégés have with their mentors [31]. Jobs in the construction industry can last from a few days to a few years, so the length of any mentor-protégé. Characteristics of mentors in the construction industry

While the studies mentioned earlier generated lists of characteristics important for mentors in the construction industry, these lists were not identical, and it is therefore possible that these lists were not exhaustive. Thus, to create an exhaustive list of characteristics for this study, additional literature related to mentoring characteristics was consulted.

Evidence from research on executive coaching suggests that the characteristics for both mentors and executive coaches are similar; however, executive coaches also possess characteristics such as being interpersonally savvy, having a customer focus, and taking appropriate action during crisis [32]. Last, an examination of each of the lists of characteristics revealed that all of them touched on the idea of emotional intelligence as being important, for example by stating that characteristics such as “empathic,” “understands others,” “interpersonally savvy” and “expresses emotions naturally” were important. The concept of emotional intelligence refers to the ability of a person to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and take appropriate actions based on these perceptions [33]. Emotional intelligence was later defined as consisting of four separate parts: appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself, appraisal and recognition of emotion in others, regulation of emotion in oneself, and use of emotion to facilitate performance [34].

In the construction industry, the tight deadlines, working with and around other trades and the potential dangers of the job can create an atmosphere of tension and anxiety. A mentor in construction with emotional intelligence could potentially regulate these emotions and balance them, while meeting deadlines and completing tasks safely. A study conducted by Law et al. [35]. Supports this idea, as peers’ ratings of emotional intelligence were predictive of supervisory ratings of in-role and extra-role performance in an employee sample. Past research from these areas will aid in the development of an exhaustive list of potential characteristics for mentors in the construction industry. In addition to creating a unique list that combines different literatures, the present study takes a slightly different approach to identifying the key mentor characteristics as perceived by construction professionals.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the results from the current study indicate that communication skills, knowledge

sharing, and correcting mistakes/giving negative feedback are important for an effective mentor in the construction industry. The results from this study can be used to augment current mentoring research and provide a starting point for mentor-assisted development in construction.

The findings on new knowledge workers perspective towards their mentors’ characteristics is in consonant with the studies of [37]. The findings indicated that mentors should be approachable, self-confident, show desire to be a mentor, provide honest feedback, self-knowledgeable and being dedicated to mentoring, were viewed to be extremely important characteristics. The other characteristics, that are, being a visionary, exposing the protégé to future opportunities, understanding, respectable, patient, being a good role model, compassionate and showing integrity were seen as important characteristics for the mentor to possess.

VII. THE IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL DIVIDE IN RELATION TO GENDER AND RACE ARE THEY BEING MENTORED THE SAME OR NOT.

What implications can be drawn from our examination of cross-cultural mentoring? There are two major areas that encapsulate our discussion: the impact and significance of mentoring at the organizational and individual levels.

Most of the literature examines the individual dynamics of mentoring: issues concerning trust, risk, and matters of interpersonal style. Overall, the literature effectively analyses the factors that influence the psychosocial and developmental components of mentoring. In sum, it is clear that mentoring benefits both parties. The protégé gains access to an experienced and expert guide: mentored faculty achieve more job success, report higher salaries, and have greater career mobility [39]. In exchange for his or her services, the mentor receives career enhancement, recognition, and personal satisfaction [39]. Indeed, both persons involved in the mentoring equation grow from the exposure to another culture and from the challenge of stepping outside of their comfort zone.

In terms of the rudimentary facets of mentoring, it is generally reported. That the protege is responsible for seeking a mentor and that faculty of color have difficulty obtaining a mentor, because of the theory of homogeneity: people prefer to mentor those from their own ethnic group. Given the direct benefits imparted by mentoring, including cross-cultural mentor ring, it is essential that new [41].

Faculty be mentored. Therefore, we recommend a proactive stance from senior faculty who are willing to mentor their younger colleagues.

Mentors in cross-cultural relationships must also understand that their job does not end with the individual protege. The mentor must do more by actively supporting broad learning initiatives at the organization to help foster the upward mobility of people of color and those that are excluded from the ranks of top management. For example, the mentor can promote workshops that address racial issues and support

networking groups among racial minority faculty. This is a key strategy in changing the face of higher education so that it looks more like the society it serves.

VIII. SEEING RACE AND FORGETTING RACE IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

One key site of struggle for learning in a cross-cultural mentoring relationship “is the nature of the mentor’s and the protégé’s attitudes towards diversity [43]. Mentors in cross-race relationships carry out career development and psychosocial functions when both members share similar understandings and strategies for dealing with racial differences in the relationship. Potential negative outcomes or problems in mentoring young graduates. Notwithstanding the benefits of mentoring stated in the literature, this does not preclude the possibility that mentoring relationships experience problems or negative outcomes, [44]. Initial research on social-psychological and interpersonal relationships notes that unpleasant incidents are common and often a neglected aspect of all relationships in mentoring, these ranges from minor episodes, such as arguing, to serious incidents, such as physical or psychological abuse [46].

In their study on negative mentoring experience revealed that protégés experience: Dissimilar personality and habits, mismatch within the dyad, self-absorption, work style, distancing behaviour, manipulative behaviour, inappropriate delegation of duty, intentional exclusion, credit taking, politicking, that is, self-promotion, technical incompetence, lack of mentor expertise, that is, interpersonal incompetency, sabotage of any efforts, general dysfunctional, that is, bad attitude, personal problems and deception [45]. The authors advocated the need for further research in the area of negative mentoring in individual disciplines which might be different from one industry to another.

Problems or negative outcomes were rare between mentors and new knowledge workers, apart from dissimilar personality and habits which was seen as a problem or negative outcome indicating that this problem occurred fairly many times. General dysfunctional, that is, bad attitudes, personal problems for example, alcohol abuse, family problems etc. and deception, that is, not being truthful were never a problem to the new knowledge workers as their tendency was towards occasionally and never occurring [47]. As per the finding it can be noted that if mentoring functions are adequately achieved then problems or negative outcomes are rarely experienced. Studies conducted by [48] on dysfunctional mentoring relationships are not fully supported by this finding. The problems or negative variable in a mentoring relationship were obtained from related literature review, [49], that new knowledge workers occasionally experienced problems during mentoring. Dissimilar personality and habits, was seen as the main problem as it fell in the mean band between 2.60 - 3.40 indicating that it happens fairly many times. General dysfunctional, that is, bad attitudes, personal problems for example, alcohol abuse,

family problems etc. and deception, that is, not being truthful were never a problem to the new knowledge workers as they fell in the mean band between 1.00 - 1.80.

IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding these limitations, the results from the current study indicate that communication skills, knowledge sharing, and correcting mistakes/giving negative feedback are important for an effective mentor in the construction industry. The results from this study can be used to augment current mentoring research and provide a starting point for mentor-assisted development in construction.

We are congruent in our understanding of the role that race and racism play in the construction industry and society. We have argued in our research that although race is clearly a social construct, its effects are real in our daily lives. Our theoretical understanding of race is one factor that shows us how to both see race and forget race in our mentoring relationship. We recognize that although our racial differences are a necessary part of our daily interaction, we also can connect as people. We have learned that the first step in getting beyond the barriers and boundaries of race is not to pretend that they do not exist.

This study is primarily the authors’ description of the extensive learning and development process for graduate engineers that has been developed and embedded within Kentz Engineers and Constructors and other construction companies. However, some evaluative conclusions can reasonably be drawn. These are:

- In global engineering and construction skills shortages are real and the largest constraint on growth in the sector.
- Companies are competing for skills and within this context those seeking to be
- “Preferred employers” are investing in learning and development and the infrastructure to support career development. Engineering graduates are in a strong position when choosing employers.
- The effort required to sustain the process should not be underestimated – it is an exercise in organization, anticipation, and will, supported by systems and infrastructure. For example, a carefully planned experiential learning programme is vital, yet difficult to sustain without a combination of on the ground buy-in and support with reporting and monitoring.

Some of the best business decisions are made in times of scarcity when the value of resources becomes fully understood. Investment in the development of graduate engineers and indeed in all Kentz employees and other construction companies is a strategic priority, and the organization is the better for it. Kentz mentoring process is a work-in-progress – all mentoring processes will remain works-in-progress if they are to remain relevant to changing business needs. It is to be hoped that the experiences related will resonate with others,

and that lessons learned may have more general application, although every organization will have its own unique needs and circumstances. Among these lessons are that mentoring has lasting benefits, but that formal programmes can fail to reflect this. An organization-wide mentoring process needs to balance the needs for uniformity with flexibility, needs to foster accountability, and needs to be refined in the light of practical realities. Above all it needs people who are committed to stick with the process in order to ensure its success.

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