

REVIEW THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING YOUNG GRADUATES IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Nkomo, M.W¹. and Thwala, W.D².

¹*Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.*

²*Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying, University of Johannesburg, South Africa*

ABSTRACT

Mentoring is important for all graduates entering the workplace, but especially for those who are struggling to come to grips with the expectations of the workplace and its language, literacy and numeracy demands. The purpose of this paper is to study the importance of mentorship in the workplace, specifically the impact of mentorship programs for young graduates, in the construction industry and to define what mentoring is, what it entails and to report findings of a study aimed at investigating the necessity, if any, for mentoring and programmes in South African, construction industry. The study was mainly a literature review with a special focus on mentoring. The data used in the report was mainly qualitative, based on the, case studies and historical data. The review is a brief exploration into mentoring of graduates entering the work place. The scope of this review is confined to the literature that discusses mentoring internal to the workplace which support on – and off job learning. The research revealed that there are several mentoring programmes being utilised throughout South Africa, with very positive results. However, these structured mentoring programmes are not being utilised to their full potential by the construction industry. The study revealed that graduates were very enthusiastic to participate in a structured mentoring programme; and also that, mentoring is recommended in a number of studies, particularly where the workplace’s language, literacy or numeracy may be an issue for the graduates entering the workplace.

Keywords: Construction Industry, Graduates, Mentoring, Workplace, Youth.

INTRODUCTION

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 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, 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.

Marsh wrote: “The philosophy of mentoring has been around for several millennia and most of its original application seems to have been particularly popular in the preparation

¹ morenaw.nkomo@gmail.com

² didibhukut@uj.ac.za

and development of royal heirs and military leaders, great philosophers and astronomers, the engineering and architectural fields, various religious orders, and by gifted craftsmen in order to pass on their skills” (Marsh, 2011). Although it is only recently that mentoring has become a feature of social policy, people were not aware of it; it is an idea that has been around for a considerable period of time. Most recent interest has derived from the business world, where mentoring is used in the induction of recruits into the culture of the organization, in improving communication between different levels of management, and in encouraging access for groups that are traditionally excluded from senior management positions (Clutterbuck, 1985), 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 (CSIR, 2008) 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 (Freedman, 1993). Thus this study is of important for the construction industry young graduates’ construction workers.

Purpose of the Study

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, helping senior managers understand the generations they manage through reverse mentoring opportunities where younger or less experienced employees as the mentors, enhancing the leadership capabilities of employees, providing support for the development of cultural appropriate business practices through the provision of in country mentors, in short enhancing the ability of leaders to operate in a global build business environment, helping the leader to give back to individuals and their community as part of a pay it forward approach.

Objective of the study

- To identify the types of mentoring programs currently utilised in the construction industry.
- To evaluate the benefits and issues in mentoring and programmes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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".

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, 2005:1). 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.

The second definition suggests that the mentee is regarded as a valued equal who happens to have a specific support needs. The relationship is one of generalised supportive friendship. The model is thus more expansive in its approach to the mentee and to the mentoring relationship.

2.1.1 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 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 (Ringgen *et al.*, 1995). Jobs in the construction industry can last from a few days to a few years, so the length of any mentor-protégé.

Once a graduate leaves an educational institution he/ 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).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly a literature review with a special focus on mentoring. The data used in the report is mainly qualitative, based on the content analysis, case studies and historical data. The review is a brief exploration into the literature on mentoring of graduates entering the work place.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1.1 Importance of Mentoring in the Workplace

Mentoring is a tool that organizations can use to nurture and grow their people, and it's gaining in popularity. As organizations strive to retain hard earned experience and wisdom, they are turning to mentoring programs as a form of interpersonal knowledge management. Mentees observe, question and explore, while mentors demonstrate, explain and model. Coaching is also a big thing in organizations today. While coaching can definitely help individuals become better leaders and managers, it doesn't really tap into the collective wisdom of people who have succeeded inside specific organizations or industries. Mentoring on the other hand, can help employees navigate organizational culture, solve problems and advance their careers. Mentoring is a great way to make sure the talent pipeline is filled with people ready to manage and lead. Additionally, organizations are using mentoring as a way to retain and recruit talent. As young graduates hit the workforce in numbers, mentoring has become a key tool for both recruiting and retention.

In many professions today, mentors are thought to enhance, if not ensure, the professional development and success of talented newcomers. Mentoring can be described as a dynamic and reciprocal relationship in a work environment whereby a more advanced and wise career incumbent (the mentor) helps a less experienced person who has development potential (the mentee – who is not his direct subordinate) develop into some specified capacity (Management today Oct 2004). However, the role of the mentor is only to provide advice. A mentor's role is twofold, firstly providing career development behaviours such as coaching, providing challenging assignments and fostering the mentee's visibility. Secondly they provide psycho-social support such as counselling, support and role modelling. Without a mentor, an individual will learn less, more slowly or not at all (Management today Oct 2004).Mentoring is about facilitating change by providing a stable source of support throughout the process.

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of supporting low- paid trainees and apprentices doing certificate- level qualifications. Mr Phillip Marsh, the Managing Director of Mentoring for Success (Pty) Ltd, said: “Sadly, in our current millennium, mentoring often fails to deliver in the corporate and public sector environments, due mainly to the fact that it is usually applied in an informal sense, with undefined or ambiguous expectations, and more often than not, involves either poorly considered or the inappropriate selection and pairing of mentors and mentees, without access to practical tools and techniques” (Marsh, 2011). Based on past experiences, I felt it necessary to investigate further the need, if any, for a good mentoring programme, rather than an informal one, for graduates entering the work place.

4.1.2 Mentoring programs currently utilised in the construction industry

In South Africa a lot of strides have been made in supporting Gautrain’s skills development imperative. Gautrain’s concessionaire, the Bombela Concession Company has committed to utilise 90% of local skills in the design, construction and operations phases of the Project. To grow the current skills base and support future economic needs, Bombela, as a Project requirement, has since the commencement of construction in 2006 had a number of training interventions, with 95% being aimed at growing skills in the technical and engineering fields. Together with Gautrain, Bombela recognizes the need for investment in its people – individual aspirations of the Project are supported by providing relevant training interventions, coaching and mentorship. Through a talent management process, individuals that perform well in their respective functions are up skilled and appointed to critical positions within the company. A thorough performance management program is in place. It allows employees together with their managers to identify opportunities for future development and training is (Gautrain, 2013).

The South African Association of Consulting Engineers (SAACE) stated that skills development is an important aspect of their association. The Young Professionals Forum is a mentorship initiative they have that allows younger people the opportunity to influence the decision-making for the future of SAACE. This mentorship initiative: The Young Professional Forum aim to recognize and expose young incoming talent so as to develop and utilize their leadership and technical skills. This Forum is supportive of the Governments Joint Initiative of Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), which is a partnership between labour, business and government to attract offshore and local skills to selected sectors to minimize the current skills shortages. It is also used as a means to mentor graduates to further develop the country’s’ growth (Moolman, 2006).

The South African Women in Engineering (SAWomEng) was founded in 2004 and started at the University of Cape Town. Their aim is to represent women in all engineering disciplines while still at university. This is the first of its kind in South Africa. Their vision is to provide mentorship for students so as to bridge the gap between the university environment and the engineering industry (Moolman, 2006). The idea is to assist students in attaining vacation work and also securing employment once their studies are complete. The five foundry pillars this organization is built on are as follows: igniting the mind, mentorship, incubating the engineering mind, providing a meeting of minds between old and new engineering, and embracing the multi-faceted nature of female engineers (Mampuru & Mosajee, 2010).

The Vuk’uphile Learnership Programme was piloted after 2004 as part of the Rural Development Programme (Desai, 2008). The Vuk’uphile Learnership Programme is a programme that addresses the shortage of work opportunities and qualified contractors by

identifying candidates throughout the country who will undergo a thirty month training programme. Civil engineers Andre Wessels and Gerhard Vivier started Focus Engineering with the aim of developing mentoring and project management services to contractors (Moolman, 2007). They saw the need to mentor contractors to be able to be efficient and successful. Similarly to what Focus Engineering accomplished under the Vuk'uphile Learnership Programme other companies like PD Naidoo & Associates followed suite. The Vuk'uphile Learnership Programme has been extensively utilised throughout the Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) (de Koker, 2009).

In South Africa there is a professional coaching and mentoring body. The Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA) is a local body comprising of a group of experienced business and life coaches who saw the need for coaching and mentoring in South Africa. COMENSA's mission is to support professional practise and a learning culture in coaching and mentoring through standards and ethics. Their vision is to empower people to achieve their full potential in a consciousness of sustainable well-being. It also underlines COMENSA's integral commitment to the process of national development, transformation and empowerment in South Africa (COMENSA, n.d.).

The SAICE Infrastructure Report Card for South Africa 2011 stated that: "training and mentorship of artisans and young engineering professionals is also essential at all levels, especially in the public sector" (Ashpole, 2011).

The South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP) has implemented a registration system for Professional Construction Mentors. This was done in order to draw the more experienced professionals to register as mentors and in so doing be able to mentor others who would need/ want to register as a professional Construction or Project Manager.

4.1.3 Benefits and issues in mentoring and programmes

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.

Serving in a role of a mentor, reinforces that the mentor is a subject matter expert and demonstrate leadership qualities by sharing this expertise. Organizations sometimes fail to realize the obstacles the young employee's faces on daily basis, the mentor can help with overcoming work related obstacles. Being a mentor provides the opportunity to enhance soft skills such as coaching, counselling, listening and leadership. As the mentor passes knowledge, he/she can help shape the future of the organization for the better. This is one case of one person making a big difference. If the mentor is successful with helping the employee, they can affect every person in the organization protégée meets. The potential graduate protégée has made it into the organization, moving up in the organization should not be too hard, This is an area where the young employee must put pride aside and realize the path to success will be much quicker and smoother using a mentor.

When a young employee becomes the protégée of a mentor, many benefits will the protégée assimilate easier into the corporate culture. The young employee 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 scarce skills
- ❖ Improve employee productivity and lastly
- ❖ Enhance employee engagement within the organisation

Further research by the American Society for Training and Development (1998) shows that when training interventions are introduced to organisations, it produces an average productivity improvement of 24%. When the same training interventions are introduced with a structured mentoring program, the average productivity improvement can rise up to 88%. Marsh goes further by stating that structured mentoring process clear benefits towards the individual. These benefits are listed below:

- ❖ It has an effect of “fast tracking” graduate development and integration into new organisations;
- ❖ It empowers employees through effective and objective processes;
- ❖ It facilitate effective and measurable job specific competency development, and

- ❖ It improves employee's performance and job satisfaction.

The above mentioned information clearly states that the benefits of mentorship take place on the individual as well as the organisational level. In the engineering industry within the public sector and the private sector, the constant transferring of knowledge and skills from more senior engineers to junior engineers are of vital importance to ensure sustainability of organisations. The current lack of good mentorship within public sector and private sector is evident. It is thus of vital importance that any professional development is evident. It is thus of vital importance that any professional development program proposed to this industry includes a good mentorship program. As mentioned above, this will not only be of benefit to engineers working in this environment, but in the long run the organisations will reap the benefits as well.

CONCLUSION

Mentoring can be beyond throwing resources at what may be seen as intractable problems. It introduces a personalized element and recognizes the psychosocial impact of poverty and inequalities. It has the potential to bring communities themselves into an analysis of themes of partnership and empowerment. In this way it could provide a means of regenerating community identities and issues.

In terms of the reviewed literature, the following recommendations are made:

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.

The benefits of having active mentoring and coaching programmes in the work place far exceeds expectations and should become part of the culture of an organization. Several mentoring programmes were discussed and their effectiveness substantiated. Knowledge, experience and career development would not fall by the wayside but utilised to develop younger individuals and in so doing benefit the company too.

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