

An exploratory study of mentoring in infrastructure development of new entry graduates in the South African construction industry

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Abstract

South Africa is once again on the brink of a massive growth and development opportunity with the Government's planned 20 year National Infrastructure Development Plan (NIDP) and the 18 Strategic Integrated Project (SIPS) groups that go with this. Mentoring is important for all new entry employees entering the workplace. In spite of the growing research on both sets of individuals, mentors and protégés, mentoring from the perception of the organization remains comparatively under described. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of mentoring, on graduates employees in the construction industry. Furthermore it will classify the drawbacks, benefits and look at imminent prospects of formal mentoring in medium sized and large organizations in South African construction industry. The paper emphasizes on how organizations view mentoring. The study was mainly a literature review with a distinct focus on formal mentoring programs on graduate's employees. The data used in the report was mainly qualitative, grounded on the, case studies and historical data. The review is into formal mentoring of graduate's employees entering the work place. The scope of this review is limited to the literature that discusses formal mentoring internal to the workplace which support on and off job learning of new entry employees. The findings revealed the organization current situation and the issues that are vital to the HR function. Mentoring is primarily used to transfer implicit knowledge from those near retirement to younger employees, substitute the personnel development and create well-being at work. Career advancement and work performance are not as important as might have been thought. Young graduates employees, in particular may petition the use of social media, alongside mentoring.

Keywords

Construction industry, Formal mentoring, Infrastructure Development, Human resource development.

1. Introduction

The Scarce and Critical Skills and Knowledge required achieving these momentous development plans have been divided between a vast arrays of occupational workgroups. Integrated workplace learning and graduates training has been identified, not as a “nice to have” initiative, but as a compulsory commitment from organizations that seek to participate in these huge opportunities. 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. Structured knowledge mentoring has been identified as a preferred methodology for achieving the measured, managed and monitored requirements of integrated workplace learning and graduates training in infrastructure development.

Valuable lessons have been learned from our most recent build programmes, such as the 2010 World Cup stadiums, King Shaka International Airport, Medupi Power Station and Gautrain. Infrastructure investment is a key priority of both the National Development Plan and the New Growth Path. Providing infrastructure for the economy and communities is one of the main ways South Africa will realize inclusive and jobs-rich growth. Quality, affordable infrastructure raises economic productivity. While mentoring can offer many advantages, some possible drawbacks merit 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. Through the National Infrastructure Plan social partners develop the capacity and skills required to meet the demands of South Africa’s growing investment programme, for instance revitalisation of public hospitals and other health facilities, national school build programme, and higher education infrastructure, water and sanitation infrastructure. There is a shortage of professionals, engineering, build environment, limited knowledge retention etc. The size and scope of the 20 year infrastructure development plan justifies the need of skills development and transfer of knowledge from senior employees to junior employees, this can be achieved by effective mentoring of graduates employees in the construction industry (Presidential Infrastructure coordinating commission report, 2012).

1. 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. Research has shown that individual characteristics such as personality are strong predictors of job-related attitudes and performance (Grant &Wrzesniewski, 2010).

2. Objectives of the study

- To investigate the impact of mentoring, on graduates employees in the construction industry.
- To identify the benefits and drawbacks of mentoring from the large and medium sized organization’s perspective.

1.3 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.

2. Literature review findings

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). Mentoring is about skill development and specialized knowledge transfer. 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. 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.

Mentoring in the construction industry 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 (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-protégé'.

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

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. Listed below are some reasons why organizations choose to establish mentoring programs. **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. **Knowledge Management or Knowledge Transfer** - mentoring provides for the interchange or exchange of information or knowledge between members of different 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). 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.

2.2 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. Mentoring of young employees is a way senior employees can help drive success of a corporation or an initiative. 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.

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 modeling (Scandura, 1997). Younger protégé's are more likely to receive more role modeling than older ones (Finkelstein et al., 2003), and increased respect for a mentor as a role model may noticeable itself in the protégé's positive attitude to work (Scandura, 1997). Structured mentorship offers various benefits. According to Marsh (2012:6) these benefits can either be directed towards the organization or the individual within the organization. Marsh goes further by listing the following organizational benefits: Increased ability to attract, develop, motivate and retain quality employees. Improvement of succession planning and talent management within the organization.

2.3 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). From the protégé'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-protégé' mismatches and inadequate relationships seem to be the most established problems in mentoring for both mentors and protégé's (Eby and Lockwood, 2005).

2.4 The impact of mentoring on graduates employees within organizations

Though viewed as a key aspect of mentoring (Stephenson, 1998), knowledge transfer has been primarily examined at the interim level (Szulanski, 1996), at the interdepartmental level (Berta & Baker, 2004), and at the team level (Gibson, Waller, Carpenter, & Conte, 2007). Grover and Davenport (2001) suggest that much research on knowledge transfer has a more macro focus, examining the transfer of knowledge between and within organizations. Knowledge management articles highlight knowledge transfer as a key

mechanism for organizational success, yet a gap exists between practice (Buckman, 1998) and formal research (Gallupe, 2001; Grover & Davenport, 2001).

Mentoring encompasses coaching, sharing perspectives, and transferring knowledge and wisdom to the mentee(s). The mentor is not a supervisor but a person with whom the employee can communicate freely and honestly without concern about being evaluated. Knowledge transfer is defined as an exchange of organizational knowledge between a source and a recipient (Grover & Davenport, 2001) in which the interchange consists of information and advice about resources and relationships. Tacit knowledge, as originally defined by Polanyi (1966), is the knowledge of "...more than we can tell" (p.4). In contrast to explicit knowledge which can be clearly stated, tacit knowledge is highly personal and embodied in one's experiences, perceptions, judgments, and intuitions.

2.4.1 Mentoring saves money, retains workers, builds leadership, and growth talent

Mentoring contributes to employee growth and tenure. In the long run, a well-organized and managed program can save the company thousands of rands. **Reduced turnover and recruiting costs.** Mentoring relationships can help retain talented people because they have a stronger commitment to the organization (Jacka and Quin, 2010). **Assistance in transferring knowledge from the retiring workforce to new workers.** Many mentoring relationships help younger employees learn from those who will retire soon. Pairing junior staff with more senior staff can reinvigorate the enthusiasm of senior employees as they transfer crucial knowledge to the next generation of workers. This reduces the loss of the tacit knowledge from seasoned veterans leaving the workforce. **Helping employees learn skills and gain knowledge.** Mentoring is an excellent example of informal learning, which is the way people learn 80% of the time in the business world (Schooley et al, 2010). A mentoring program reduces training costs due to the mentor/mentee informal learning relationship, which often deals with content one-on-one that otherwise would be covered in a formal course. It also brings new employees up to speed quickly in those first few months of employment. The chief learning and development officer in a global consulting firm confirms the value of mentoring as a learning tool: "People grow more with human interaction on the job, and we are trying to bring that to all our employees. The best way to learn is from a fellow professional." **Assistance in career growth, building leadership capacity, and increasing bench strength.** Mentees can put their learning on a fast track with mentoring. If they're headed toward management, for example, the mentoring may focus on becoming a better leader and manager. When the mentor shares her own experiences, gives advice, and suggests readings, online courses, or other experiences to help other employees move toward their goals, she builds her own leadership skills in the process. Enhanced bench strength in company leadership ensures successful succession planning and increases productivity.

2.4.2 Performance

The purpose of knowledge transfer is to pass information from the more- experienced to the less-experienced employees so that the less-experienced employees can build the capabilities needed to assume future roles in the organization (DeLong, 2004). Research at both the organizational and individual level of analysis appears to support the notion that knowledge transfer mediates the relationship between mentoring and performance.

As an outcome of mentoring relationships in workplace settings, retention is of interest in this study because of its importance to organizational performance. For decades, management researchers have emphasized the importance of retaining talented employees through research on

turnover. If organizations invest in talented employees through increases in their knowledge, the knowledge transferred to these employees is lost if they leave the organization, and the investment made to them. Knowledge workers are increasingly more important for organizational competitiveness today so the knowledge transfer between employees and the retention of key employees is critically important. Organizations with higher levels of mentoring had lower turnover; moreover, they suggested that the mentoring specifically assisted in developing protégés' knowledge and skills. Based on the above research, one may posit that the knowledge and feedback provided to a protégé by a mentor may influence the protégé's turnover intentions.

3. Conclusion

In this paper the authors have endeavored 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 organizational solution. There are concerns regarding the outcomes of mentoring, but it is our opinion that these can be minimized by careful implementation planning. Mentoring is a complex and delicate organizational process and there is little doubt it can be a critical force for organizations, the mentors and the mentees. The results suggest that mentoring is currently rather widely used. The larger the organization the more often it uses mentoring as a formal training. The study reveals the organizations' 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 transferrable of tacit knowledge, learning and well-being. Most HR specialist's 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 organizations 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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