

Challenges Facing Mentees and Mentors in the South African Construction Industry: A Case of Gauteng Region

Ayodeji Oke

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
emayok@gmail.com

Clinton Aigbavboa

Associate Professor, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
caigbavboa@uj.ac.za

Madidimalo Mutshaeni

Graduate Student, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
Mutshaenimadid@gmail.com

Abstract

A major requirement in the development and growth of an industry or organization is the breeding of new workforce through proper training and effective mentoring by experienced members. However, the process is not expected to be smooth due to individual dispositions and attitudes, organization interest, avenue and opportunity for mentoring, amongst others. In this study, various challenges of mentoring encountered by mentees and mentors in their mentoring activities were examined. This is with a view to promote effective mentoring among professionals in the construction industry in the quest to improve their productivity and thereby enhance better performance of construction projects. Data were collected through administration of questionnaires on professionals in the built environment using convenient sampling technique. Personality issues that are concerned with differences in behaviors and disposition to matters are the major challenges of mentoring in the construction industry. More so, attitudes of the mentees dictates and affects behaviors of mentors and vice-versa. In view of this, professionals involved in mentoring should be concerned about their attitudes to each other and personal beliefs should not be a basis for judgment. Mutual respect and concern for growth and development should form the basis of mentoring relationships.

Keywords

Knowledge, Mentee, Mentor, Skill, Training.

1. Introduction

Due to increase in demand for complex and innovative developments, Nkomo and Thwala (2014) noted that the construction industry has become highly competitive and the need for training and development of workmen and professionals cannot be over-emphasized. There are several ways for achieving this and one of them is through mentoring. According to Hoffmeister, *et al.*, (2011), the concept of mentoring is related to overseeing someone's career and personal development. Therefore, the purpose and objective of mentoring is to groom potential construction leaders for the purpose of gaining necessary experience, skills and emotional balance for better performance. This does not only empower the personnel but aid improved productivity of organization or industry. For this process to be effective and successful, the two parties involved, that is, mentor and mentee, must possess certain characteristics, attributes and understanding of mentoring and its techniques (Yokwana, 2015).

However, due to various challenges, Wong and Premkumar (2007) noted that mentoring has become ineffective and rarely practiced as expected. The challenges faced in mentoring relationships according to Nkomo and

Thwala (2014) can become dysfunctional and eventually lead to overdependence, deception, resentment, or harassment. The mentoring relationship can also contribute or impact negatively in terms of fairness as the challenged may see it as a strategy to get ahead. Pinho, *et al.*, (2005) noted that this is mostly common with cross-gender and cross-race relationships.

Mentoring is supposed to be done with the intention of empowering young inexperienced employees that could possibly rise through the rank to become future leaders in the construction industry. Even though mentors are supposed to be senior employees with years of experience, Nichols (2016) noted that years of experience and practice do not necessarily guarantee that any senior employee can automatically become a leader or mentor. Mentors should be individuals who have showed excellent leadership qualities in the company and are supposed to inspire young inexperienced employees (Dionisio, 1994). Scandura, *et al.* (1992) pointed out that the world of a mentor is completely unique and different in its own way, comprising of personal and professional motives that can only be known by the mentor. It was further noted that mentor's intentions are never constant, they are due to the changes through time as a result of several factors.

Effective mentoring has the potential to ensure continuity and enhance better development and overall growth of individuals and the organization in general. In the construction industry, the process is vital for career development and growth of construction professionals and workforce engaged in delivering infrastructures. Yokwana (2015) noted that the ultimate goal of any mentoring relationship is to empower each other so it is important to maintain constant engagement and be aware of the purpose and be guided by essential principles. In this study, various challenges to effective mentoring were examined and the findings will be of importance to employees and employers in the built environment in the quest to ensure effective mentoring for improved performance of the construction projects.

2. Literature Review

According to Nkomo and Thwala (2014), the construction industry is extremely busy and its scope of work is usually complicated. It involve the use of heavy equipments and machinery as well as trained and experienced professionals with diverse skills and abilities, thus, it is very different to typical everyday office jobs. Due to it being a complex and highly competitive industry, it is important for effective mentoring to take place in the construction industry in order to develop, train and mould future leaders that could run and lead the industry.

Through the process of mentoring, Yokwana (2015) concluded that experienced and knowledgeable individuals refer to as mentors assist mentees, that is new or fresh professionals to discover their potentials and improve their productivity concerning their contribution to the engineering and built environment. More so, Russel (2006) observed that mentees are also showed how to use the theoretical knowledge they acquired at tertiary level and are properly also guided in defining, pursuing and achieving their career goals.

Hamlin and Sage (2011) suggested that the effectiveness of any mentoring relationship depends highly on the characteristics possessed by parties involved, that is, mentor and mentee as well as whether both parties know how to take advantage of opportunities brought or presented by either party. The quality of the relationship between a mentor and a mentee is a key factor to ensuring successful mentoring. For effective mentoring relationships, mentors and leaders need to adopt both pulling and pushing mentoring style (Nichols, 2016). This according to Hamlin and Sage (2011) was described as presenting a safe avenue where the mentee feels able to share and express their agendas, interests and goals; a place where support is offered by listening; an opportunity to ask the right relevant questions; stimulating the mentee's thinking in such a way that they arrive at answers to their problems; as well as offering needed ideas, knowledge, tools and techniques that could enhance productive thinking and better performance.

According to Wong and Premkumar (2007), mentors can help to develop effective mentoring relationships by creating a safe environment; taking time to listen attentively without bias or passing unfair judgment; agreeing on objectives and goals rather than approaches; and acknowledging, accepting and appreciating differences when

noticed. Stone (2007) highlighted the following characteristics of an excellent mentor in order for a mentoring relationship to be effective; strong interpersonal attributes; recognizing the accomplishment of each other; being an excellent supervisor; accepting risks and uncertainties that are associated with mentoring; and willingness to be available to help in advancement of individuals in an organization. Hamlin and Sage (2011) included the following essential characters; active listening and asking questions; setting clear goals; flexibility; as well as building and maintaining close and harmonious relationships with management through trust, empowerment, focus and empathy.

The responsibility for effective mentoring relationships do not only rely with the mentor providing the needed guidance and direction, the role of the mentee is also as important. Stone (2007) highlighted basic characteristics that an excellent mentee should possess in order to secure an effective mentoring relationship, and overcome basic challenges that may arrive. These includes demonstrating intelligence; Showing initiative; and taking responsibility for own development. More so, Hamlin and Sage(2011) noted the following attributes; expressing needs clearly and helping to identify development goals; seeking input from mentor; demonstrating commitment by following up on points set in meetings; making time to attend meetings punctually; maintaining confidentiality; and seeking to understand roles, responsibilities and boundaries.

It is evident from previous studies that effective mentoring in any organization or industry, including the construction industry, has lots of benefits if fully and effectively harnessed. Amelink (2010) noted that effective mentoring assists in developing a mentee's career as they get exposed to the practical aspect of their career by their mentor. While being close to a mentor, a mentee is able to mingle with organizations that could possibly assist in career growth and future employment/partnerships.

Positive career developments have been associated with mentoring as people who were mentored effectively reported of how they received career guidance and support; increased salaries and job satisfaction (Nkomo and Thwala, 2014). This indicate that mentoring has a positive impact on individual's growth and development. The basic challenges affecting mentoring relationships in the construction industry were examined in this study.

3. Research Methodology

Due to the nature of variables to be examined, category of data to be collected and character of respondents involved, survey design was adopted for this study. Using existing literature as the basis for obtaining general challenges to effective and efficient mentoring in industries and organizations, quantitative research approach was adopted for data collection. Close-ended questionnaires of multiple-choice answers were adopted as research instruments and they were administered on construction professionals practicing in Gauteng region of South Africa. These professionals are architects, quantity surveyors, engineers, construction managers and construction project managers.

In designing the instrument, various questions were asked but it was ensured that negative, irrelevant, bias and long questions were avoided. First section of the instrument was used to collect biographical information of respondents while the second part were framed to relate directly with the objective of the study. 5-point Likert scale was employed where 1= Strongly Disagree (SD); 2= Disagree (D); 3= Neutral (N); 4= Agree (A); and 5= Strongly Agree (SA). Mean Item (MIS) and Standard Deviation (SD) were computed from the scale using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and the results were used to assess order of importance of the identified factors.

Using Cronbach's alpha value, reliability tests were conducted on the two sections in the second part of the instrument, which are challenges from the view of mentees and problems caused by mentors in a mentoring relationship. The analysis reveal a value of 0.773 and 0.716 respectively. These are greater than the acceptable reliability coefficient of 0.70 (Santos, 1999), it could be concluded that the instrument adopted for the study is reliable.

4. Findings and Discussion

Forty-five questionnaires were distributed, thirty-eight were retrieved while thirty-four were adequately completed and found suitable for further analysis. There are 55.9% and 44.1% of male and female respondents respectively indicating gender balance and adequate representation. Age group of these professionals revealed that 64.7% are between 20 and 25 years, 29.4% are between 26 and 30 years while 5.9% are 31 years and older. Considering respondents' year of experience and practice in the construction industry, both groups of mentees and mentors were captured. About 55.3%, 23.7%, 13.3% and 7.8% have 1-10, 11-20, 21-30 and above 30 years experience respectively. Respondents are also spread across various professions in the industry, these include architecture, engineering, construction management, quantity surveying and construction project management. Of these, 62.1% are junior employees while 35.9% are senior employees and they have been involved in about 11 projects on the average.

Table 1 displays the challenges of mentoring from the perspective of mentees. Considering the MIS values, it could be observed that the respondents disagree with the identified challenges with the highest value of 2.42 which is less than the average of 3.00. However, the results were ranked as follows: My mentor and I had different personalities was ranked first and had a mean score of 2.42 and SD=1.640; My mentor and I argued was ranked second with a mean score of 1.73 and SD=0.977; My mentor's personal problems affected work was ranked third with a mean score of 1.70 and SD=1.104; My mentor had multiple personalities which made it difficult to work together was ranked fourth with a mean score of 1.55 and SD= 1.063; My mentor was self-absorbed was ranked fifth with a mean score of 1.48 and SD=0.755. Moreover; My mentor was distant towards me was also ranked fifth with a mean score of 1.48 and SD=0.939; My mentor delegated duties inappropriately was ranked sixth with a mean score of 1.36 and SD= 0.549; My mentor took credit for the work that was not his/her own was ranked seventh and had a mean score of 1.33 and SD=0.777; My mentor's attitude was bad and negative was ranked eighth with a mean score of 1.30 and SD= 0.684; My mentor excluded me from projects intentionally was ranked ninth with a mean score of 1.27 and SD=0.517; My efforts were sabotaged was ranked tenth with a mean score of 1.21 and SD= 0.650.

In agreement with the findings, Nkomo and Thwala (2014) stated that the construction industry has tight deadlines that can cause tension and anxiety, making it difficult to work together with mentees. More so, Rogers (2008) noted that personality conflicts can pose as the most difficult challenge to deal with, followed by constant arguing and personal problems affecting work. However Starr-Glass (2014) believed that the main challenge would be, when a mentor starts talking to the mentee as if the latter works for the former, which in turn brings about bad attitude from the mentors side.

Table 1: Mentee Challenges

Challenges	MIS	SD	Rank
My mentor and I had different personalities	2.42	1.64	1
My mentor and I argued	1.73	0.98	2
My mentor's personal problems affected work	1.70	1.10	3
My mentor had multiple personalities which made it difficult to work together	1.55	1.06	4
My mentor was self-absorbed	1.48	0.76	5
My mentor was distant towards me	1.48	0.94	5
My mentor delegated duties inappropriately	1.36	0.55	6
My mentor took credit for work that was not his/her own	1.33	0.78	7
My mentor's attitude was bad and negative	1.30	0.68	8
My mentor excluded me from projects intentionally	1.27	0.52	9
My efforts were sabotaged	1.21	0.65	10

Table 2 highlight the results of the challenges mentors had with mentees during their mentoring relationships. The major challenge is that the mentor wanted to prove himself with a mean score of 4.03 while others were below the average of 3.00. I took more work than I could handle was ranked second; My ambition got in the way was ranked third, My mentor gave me tight deadlines I could not meet was ranked fourth with a mean and I

became over dependent on my mentor was ranked fifth.

In support of the findings, Pinho, *et al.*, (2005) stated that a mentee may overwork themselves just to prove themselves and another challenge occurs when mentors take control and mentees end up being dependent on the mentor. It was further pointed that mentoring relationship may lead to over-dependence, resentment, deception or harassment. Starr-Glass (2014) also advised that a mentee should not change the focus of his/her role in the course of trying to prove themselves to their mentor or leader. However, Rogers (2008) concluded that regardless of the mentoring relationships nature, becoming over dependent on a mentor is a major trap that should be avoided.

Table 2: Mentor Challenges

	MIS	SD	Rank
I wanted to prove myself	4.03	1.31	1
I took more work than I could handle	2.65	1.41	2
My ambition got in the way	2.38	1.28	3
My mentor gave me tight deadlines I could not meet	2.29	1.34	4
I became over dependent on my mentor	1.71	1.09	5

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The challenges associated with mentoring are enormous but surmountable. Aside from individual differences of the two major parties, that is, mentee and their mentor, there are external factors that impact mentoring positively and negatively. The external factor can be a third party affair in which someone that is not a major party to the relationship influences either or both parties and thereby affect the relationship. It can also be environmental factors such as economic issues, organization's belief and practice, etc. Major challenges of mentoring are related to time management, lack of or improper meeting, lack of expressed interest by top management, mentee and mentor's clash of personalities, mentee trying to prove themselves, mentee taking more work than they can handle and mentee's ambition getting in the way.

However, a good mentor should be willing to sacrifice time for the mentee but care should be taken so that the mentee do not become too dependent on the mentor.

Mentors and mentees should never be forced into mentoring relationships, it should be allowed to develop over time. It also necessary for mentors and mentees to communicate, highlight their basic objectives and work towards the same goal. When the mentor is at fault, it is important to revisit the positive intentions for mentoring. Sometimes a mentor may become discouraged because of lack of visible results, simply because they are not aware of how the mentee is benefitting from their partnership. This is because much of the value added to a mentee, in term of self-confidence, self-esteem and trust are not visible or tangible. More so, when the mentee is at fault, discussion with the mentor should be employed to resolve issues and strengthen the relationship so as to refocus on unified agenda and goals.

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