

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EFFECTIVE MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR GRADUATES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

A mentoring program is a tool that is used to increase the skills of construction graduates. Many construction graduates struggle to perform their duties in the industry due to lack of experience and skills. The government and other construction firms implemented mentoring programs to utilize them as the solution to increase the skills of construction graduates in the industry; however a number of construction graduates participate in mentoring programs but even after completing mentoring programs they still need further training to enhance their skills. This implies that the implemented mentoring programs have not been effective. Many mentoring programs are not successful and they don't produce the expected results. The aim of the paper is to look at the effectiveness of mentoring programs for construction graduates. This study will determine evaluation systems which are used to measure the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Furthermore it will look at the effects of mentoring programs on graduate's employees and establish measures to improve mentoring programs. 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 study revealed that the main important evaluation systems for measuring mentoring programs were: revisiting program goals; program outcomes measuring and interviews & focus groups. Further the findings revealed that the major effects of mentoring programs included: develops networking for graduates within the organization and revealed the main important measurements for improving mentoring programs for construction graduates include: clearly define roles and responsibilities for each graduates, increase quality of education and time spent on the programs and training the mentor. The results from this study can be used to contribute important information to the government and other construction firms in terms of implementing effective mentoring programs which will always produce the required outcomes.

Keywords: Mentoring programs, Construction graduates, Mentors, Human Resource Management, Effectiveness.

Introduction

The construction industry is one of the major sectors which contribute to the economy of South Africa. It is for this reason that the industry has to keep up with producing the required quality, however the industry needs to be always filled with the people with enough skills to continue with the work but as nature takes its course people grow old and they all resign when their time is up, hence new graduates are introduced to the industry. According to Dainty et., al (2005) the construction skills shortage has a negative impact on the construction industry. This impact affects the construction industry's performance and future developments of the construction industry. The government and many construction firms implement mentoring programs which are used to transmit knowledge from old people with experience to new graduates. Introducing new graduates to the industry using mentoring programs that has been utilized for many years but the question is, are the mentoring programs used in the construction industry for familiarizing the graduates with the industry producing new employees who will be able to take over from old people who are leaving the industry?

According to Ortiz, Castells & Sonnemann, (2009) the main purpose of the construction industry is to elevate the social, economic and environmental indicators of sustainability. This basically means that the main purpose of the construction industry is to improve the quality of life for people by helping them to live in a healthy environment where there is socialization and economic growth. The construction companies in South-Africa have been producing poor quality of works and low productivity which affects the economy. The reasons for this is because the companies and the employees were not following the correct construction practices and some of the employees didn't know the correct principles because they lack the required skills. Skills shortage in the construction has been termed as one of the major setbacks of the construction industry. The government and other construction firms utilize mentoring programs which are used to train new entry construction graduates. Many construction graduates participate in mentoring programs but don't acquire the required skills for them

to start their careers even after completing the duration of these mentoring programs. Many construction graduates concludes their training under mentoring programs but they still need a lot of training even after completing mentoring programs.

Objectives of the study

- 🚧 To assess systems for measuring mentoring programs in the construction industry in South Africa.
- 🚧 To evaluate the effects of mentoring programs on graduates employees in South Africa.
- 🚧 To establish measure to improve mentoring programs for construction graduates in South Africa.

Review of literature

According to a discussion document on restoring skills (2007) compiled by the CIDB (Construction Industry Development Board) along with the public works the construction industry has experienced a major shortage of skills. The document further suggested that the public works will create a document that will be used by construction firms to enhance the skills of their employees. According to Zhang et., al (2016), mentoring programs can be described as a process of taking care of new graduates in their respective fields while growing them personally and professionally. further states that that this process can only be undertaken by a person who is more skilled and experienced in acting as the motivator, teacher, role model and a friend to the graduate. Mentoring programs can be summarized as being a process which is implemented by many construction firms to empower the careers of new construction graduates including both professional and personal growth. Mentoring programs plays a vital role in enhancing the careers of new graduates.

Mentoring programs can either be informal or formal pairing between the graduate and the mentor were the graduates obtain information, guidance regarding their career paths from experienced mentors who has the skill to lead young graduates. They are procedures which are very important for organizations as they channel coaching and ideas from experienced employees who are about to retire to new graduates who will be able to grow the organizations further. According to Agumba & fester,

(2010) the relationship between the mentor and the graduate is not only for the duration of the programs, in addition Agumba and fester (2010) explain that the relationship between the two parties extends to sharing of personal interests and values between the mentor and the graduate. Wanberg, Mueller & Marchese, (2006) also explain that the relationship between the mentor and the graduate consists of sharing personal interest which will make it easy for both of them to share the same interest regarding the programs. In summary the relationship between the mentor and the graduate in informal mentoring can only be ended by the two parties, but not during the progress of mentoring programs. Singh, Bains & Vinnicombe (2002), elucidated the relationship between the mentor and the graduate in an informal mentoring as the kind of relation which can only be decided by the two parties if it continues or ends after completing the duration of the program.

The relationship between the mentor and the graduate is the main difference between informal mentoring and formal mentoring. The relationships are organized in a different way were by in a formal mentoring program the relationship is expected to exist for the duration of the program and no longer than that. According to Wanberg, Mueller & Marchese, (2006) the relationship of both the mentor and the graduate is dictated by the specified duration of the program. Wanberg, et al (2006) further notes that formal mentoring are not effective enough compared to informal mentoring programs due to the fact that the pairing of both mentors and graduates are not based on both the parties having same interest regarding the programs. The findings of the study by Ragins, Cotton and Miller, (2000) are in contrast with the above as they reveal that formal mentoring programs produce equal benefits as informal mentoring programs because the relationship between the mentor and the graduate is formalized to concentrate on the programs only and excluding any personal interactions. One of the main challenges that new entry construction graduates come across is linking what they learnt from school to doing it practically at work. There are numerous purposes for implementing mentoring programs, but one of the main purposes of implementing mentoring programs is to help new construction graduates understand the construction industry and how to work within the industry as they are new from varsities/colleges, furthermore they are used to help new construction graduates understand their career and how to grow in the industry. It is important for the government and other construction firms to

make sure that mentoring programs are evaluated in order for them to produce the required objectives. The purpose of evaluating mentoring programs includes, identifying any defects of mentoring programs and how to come up with clear measured of fixing the problems hindering the progress of mentoring programs. According to Carter, (1994) the reason why organizations should evaluate mentoring programs is that they use them as human resource development technique with the aim of developing a concrete workforce structure of the organization. This obligates the organizations to always monitor and evaluate mentoring programs.

Evaluation systems for measuring the effectiveness of mentoring programs

Identifying the purpose of evaluating mentoring programs is one of the major factors in evaluating mentoring programs, this helps the program evaluator not to deviate from acquiring the required information. The first task in identifying the purpose of evaluating mentoring is to first know and understand the information that is required for evaluating the programs. In addition identifying the purpose of mentoring programs can be done in two forms of getting information from the programs. Formative evaluation is explained as getting information during the course of mentoring programs, where this information will help to improve the programs. Summative evaluation consists of information that is collected after the completion of mentoring programs to check if the objectives were met. Recognizing the purpose of mentoring programs assists the evaluator to be able to measure all the variables in mentoring programs, these variables include resources, activities and objectives.

Methods of collecting data for the evaluation of mentoring programs

Collecting data for evaluating mentoring programs is crucial. Choosing the correct method of collecting data is also vital as it will help in collecting enough information for the evaluation. Determining on which method to use for evaluating mentoring programs helps the evaluator to have enough time to gather information, the evaluation system is within the budget and time. This system is important if the evaluator is undertaking the evaluation using the people participating within the programs to get the opinions from them based on the program. The best method of collecting data from accomplices regarding the evaluation of mentoring programs is through conducting interviews and focus groups with

the participants. This method attains adequate information if the evaluator assures the participants that he will keep everything confidential and no one's name is going to be mentioned. In contract. Accompanying interviews and focus group is not the best method as it takes time to gather data from the participants and the evaluator has restricted time to gather his data.

Benchmarking is one of the most cost effective ways of evaluating mentoring programs. In this system of measuring the effectiveness of mentoring programs the evaluator compares the program under study with any similar mentoring program which was successful and produced the required results. Rhodes et., al (2006) states that the program which is being compared with the program under study must have been successfully completed within the specified duration without having to be improved or fixed. Both the programs must have the same structures and goals. **Benefit cost analysis.** Mentoring programs are very expensive to implement and to keep them running. Dysfunctional mentoring programs produce the unexpected results, in addition dysfunctional mentoring programs generates costs for the organizations as they benefit nothing from this kinds of mentoring programs. Furthermore the costs of dysfunctional mentoring programs includes paying qualified mentors, buying the required resource for training and developing the graduates. According to Burgess & Zerbe, (2011) **benefit cost analysis** can be explained as the discounting of future benefits and current costs. According to Gibb, (1994) cost benefit analysis is the kind of system that needs a qualified program evaluator to be able to compare the current costs of running a mentoring program against future benefits like new graduates who will benefit the organization. The aim of this system is to help the evaluator to check if the program under study should continue or be stopped due to the fact that it will not produce the required results and this will produce further costs of the company. **Analyzing previous cases** this mainly focuses on information that is already available rather than having to monitor or access the program which might take a lot of time. This is a different approach in evaluating a mentoring program. This strategy helps the coordinator to acquire available information based on past individuals' experience According to Gibb, (1994) Analyzing cases helps to identify key relationships and to analyze them in more detail, furthermore key relationships can be identified as those were positive effects or problems were identifiable.

Effects of mentoring programs on graduate employees

Many construction graduates face major problems when they are new in the industry, the major problem they face is when they have to transmit what they learnt at school to practical works in the industry. Ragins et., al (2000) explains that there is huge difference between a graduate that has been mentored and the one who is not mentored, furthermore he states that a graduate that has been mentored produces the required duties compared to a graduate that has not been mentored. Skilled mentors are the main important elements of mentoring programs. It is important that construction firms and the government hire mentors who have the skill to produce the objectives which will enforce positive effects on the graduates. Further outlines that marginal mentors are not effective compared to complete mentors.

Most of the impacts of mentoring programs for the graduates are beneficial but even though there is little research on negative impacts of mentoring programs on graduates a few negative impacts exists. The relationship of the mentor and the graduates can initiate negative impacts on graduate, this can occur when the mentor is being unfair on the graduate. This will only cause difficulty in the graduate as he will not follow the rules of his mentor. According to the findings of Eby & McMacManus, (2004) many construction graduates have reported bad experience from mentors behaviors which resulted in them being difficult all the time. According to Doughery & Dreher, (2007) effects of mentoring programs on graduates are categorized based on short term programs and long term programs. Doughery & Dreher, (2007) explains that effects of long term programs include promotions, compensation, job satisfaction and a good career success and impacts of short term programs includes include psychosocial, career related and role-modelling. **Good communication skills** are very vital for any employee in any organization representing any industry. According to Cole, (2015) mentoring programs provide good communication skills to the graduates participating in the programs. Maguire & Pitceathly, (2002) states that mentoring programs help construction graduates to have good communication skills which will help them to adapt within the organization easily, furthermore he notes that this communications skills that graduates acquire from mentoring programs help them to be able to identify any problems and how to solve the problems without the help of their mentors while interacting with other employees within the organizations. Mentoring programs plays a dynamic role

in developing new **Professional's leadership skills**. Furthermore new graduates acquire leadership skills through engagements on conferences, committees. Tables associations and other related activities during the progress of the mentoring program. Participating in the meetings transmit leadership towards the graduates as they can be able to raise their opinions in front of other group of professionals.

Measures that can be taken to improve mentoring programs for construction graduates

It is very vital for this sector to be effective but like other sectors the construction industry needs resources in order to be effective for the economy. One of the main important resource is the personnel. The kind of personnel that is needed needs to have the required skills to be able to perform the correct construction practices. Without this skills the construction industry will not be effective and this will affect the economy. According to Poulsen, (2006) the construction market conditions are changing, the economy is also changing and the needs for competencies are also changing.in addition he further stated that mentoring programs are the only solution in making sure that new graduates are able to be competent in the industry. Many mentoring programs don't produce the main objectives that were set when they were implemented. This is mainly caused by not following procedures of implementing mentoring programs and some don't produce the required objectives because the principles of assessing the effectivity of mentoring programs is not followed. According to McCormick (2014) also stated that mentoring programs fail because the people who implement the programs fail to match the correct Mentor with the correct graduate, mentoring programs are dysfunctional because they are not being implemented to suite the set objectives. The relationship between the mentor and the graduate is very vital for mentoring programs. This is the core point of mentoring programs as both the parties needs to share the same interest on the programs. According to Holley and Caldwell, (2012) many graduates and mentors don't finish the duration of the programs because their relationship is not concrete. It is very vital for both the mentor and the graduate to have common grounds in terms of sharing ideas to avoid dysfunctional relationships which might cause either one to pull out of the program. The program facilitators should **encourage good relationship between the mentor and the graduate**. Many formal mentoring relationships might consist of mentor graduate pairing which might not work, but the program facilitators should encourage a good relation to avoid future problems during the process of

the mentoring program. Poulsen (2013) suggests that the first step in making sure that the organization gets the mentor that will produce the required outcomes is to focus on showing the mentor how he is going to experience learning opportunities from the program. This will interest the mentor and make him to be the correct candidate to take over as the programs mentor who will connect with the graduates. Sanfey., et al (2013) noted that the graduates must be clear and sure about their goals as they are new in the industry. According to Rhodes, (2006) positive effects of mentoring programs are derived from the support and role modelling coming from the mentor. **The communication between the mentor and the graduate** is very vital for the graduate. The interaction between the mentor and the graduate must consists of the graduate's work-related goals and some personal problems if the graduate is experiencing such. According to Noe, (2006) citing Kram (1985) the graduate must use the time he spends with the mentor effectively in order to ask unclear questions and discuss some problems with the mentor. Lyons & Oppler, (2004) states that the frequency of meeting between the mentor and the graduate is crucial for developing the graduate's career. Wanberg, (2007) citing (Dindia, 2003; Hinde, 1997; Reis & Shaver, 1998) states that self-disclosure by the graduate is the most important process within the mentoring relationship and is vital for career development including good communication between the two parties.

Conclusion and recommendations

Literature revealed that there are many evaluation systems which can be used to measure the performance of mentoring programs. The literature further outlined the main evaluation systems which are vital for measuring mentoring programs. In addition the literature revealed the major effects of mentoring programs on participants and also the literature revealed the main measures which can be utilized to improve the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Further the findings of the study revealed the major evaluation systems that can be used to measure the performance of mentoring programs and the findings were in common agreement with the literature reviewed. The findings of this study will contribute a lot to the government and construction firms implementing mentoring programs as they will help them to implement effective mentoring programs for construction graduates. The study further notes that regular inspections and improvements on the progress of mentoring programs is vital for them

to be successful. It is recommended that the organization and government must consider the already introduced E- mentoring programs which will be time effective for the mentors.

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