

## An investigation of training and mentoring of emerging contractors in the Eastern Cape

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### **Abstract**

Having an effective mentoring programme in place in the construction industry is critical to the development and growth of emerging contractors as well as the industry as a whole. A survey was undertaken among the mentees who attended a specific mentoring programme in the Eastern Cape to establish the need for training, mentoring and monitoring of emerging contractors. Primary data was collected by means of a telephonic survey of the emerging contractors as well as the mentors and service providers regarding the mentoring programme. Secondary data was obtained from the survey of the literature. The main findings were that there is a huge need for training and mentoring of emerging contractors and that monitoring after completion of the programme is a necessity. Furthermore, although it was determined that all facets of training and mentoring are important, in order to ensure the overall development of emerging contractors, the development of financial and management skills on site requires the most attention.

Keywords: Training, mentoring, monitoring, emerging contractors

### **Abstrak**

Om 'n effektiewe mentorskap-program in plek te hê vir die konstruksie-industrie is krities vir die ontwikkeling en groei van opkomende kontrakteurs, sowel as die industrie as geheel. 'n Studie is onderneem tussen opkomende kontrakteurs wat 'n spesifieke mentorskap-program in die Oos Kaap bygewoon het, om vas te stel of daar 'n vraag na opleiding, mentorskap en monitering van opkomende kontrakteurs bestaan. Primêre data is gevorder deur middel van 'n telefoniese vraelys aan opkomende kontrakteurs oor die mentorprogram so wel as die mentors en diensverskaffers van die program. Sekondêre data was gevorder vanaf literatuur. Die hoof bevindinge is dat daar 'n groot aanvraag vir opleiding en mentorskap van opkomende kontrakteurs is, en dat monitering na voltooiing van die mentorskapprogram 'n noodsaaklikheid is. Verder is daar gevind dat, alhoewel alle fasette van opleiding en mentorskap belangrik is, om te verseker dat algehele ontwikkeling van die opkomende kontrakteur plaasvind, finansiële en bestuursbekwaamheid die meeste aandag benodig.

Sleutelwoorde: Opleiding, mentorskap, monitering, opkomende kontrakteurs

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## 1. Introduction

The Greeks defined the term 'mentoring' as early as 800BC (Caruthers, 1991). A more recent definition of mentoring is: *A Mentor is a trusted councillor or teacher and can be seen as the process of walking alongside someone to learn from them (Anon, 2005: online).* Training is a method of instruction and should not be confused with mentoring. According to Anon (2005: online) *Training involves the transfer of learning from one individual, usually an expert, to another individual or a group.* Furthermore, as a result of mentoring having been viewed as a career development tool in organisations, researchers have focused on identifying the antecedents and consequences of mentoring, and have not specifically focused on integrating mentoring with other career and organisational constructs such as the construction industry (Greenhaus & Callanan, 1994).

Since 1994, the democratically elected government of South Africa has brought about various changes and challenges. The construction industry entered into a new 'era' with a plethora of 'emerging contractors' entering the market. This resulted in changes in mindsets and new approaches as to how projects should be managed from a consulting point of view, as well as from the emerging contractors' perspective. For a number of years the main focus was on 'economic empowerment', which in the building industry specifically refers to black emerging contractors (Sigcau, 2000; Hauptfleisch, 2000). This in turn resulted in new challenges, *inter alia*, to ensure that not only 'empowerment' is experienced, but that sustainable business enterprises are realised. However, due to the poor performance of emerging contractors in the form of either late completion or non completion of projects, it became clear that there was a dire need for the training of emerging contractors.

Initially, training constituted a minor component in terms of realising sustainable business enterprises and more and more emphasis was placed on 'mentoring' as well as 'monitoring' of emerging contractors. Various training and mentorship programmes have been developed and implemented. In terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998, the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) were formed (CETA, 2006). The CETA developed a sector skills plan through a consultative process, which allowed for a 'training and development strategy' for the sector (CETA, 2006). Furthermore, the national government launched the Emerging Contractor Development Programme (ECDP), which focused on the building industry (Department of Public Works, 2002). This was specifically designed with the empowerment of black emerging contractors in mind

(Hauptfleisch, 2000). Sigcau (2000: online) highlights the importance of mentoring as follows:

*In essence, we are talking of black contractors who are struggling to overcome business impediments as a result of apartheid, and who therefore need support to ensure that they do indeed merge into the mainstream of the South African economy.*

The critical research question is whether the need for training and mentoring still exists and if the level of literacy or skills relative to certain facets of building affect firstly, the focus of mentoring and training, and secondly the outcome or results obtained through the mentoring and training programmes.

This article reports on research conducted relative to a specific mentoring programme and presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations for the future development of similar programmes.

## **2. Research method**

The primary objective was to establish the level of literacy, building literacy or competency of emerging contractors and determine whether a need for training and mentoring relative to certain facets exist. Furthermore the objective was to determine what effect the training and mentoring had on emerging contractors that had undergone training on a mentoring programme.

The descriptive survey method was used for data generation and analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). The quantitative research method was applied which relies on measurement of variables to compare and analyse the data. A questionnaire was developed relating to the research problem and sub-problems and the required data was gathered through telephonic interviews. Telephonic interviews were used as it was quicker and most of the target population were contactable by phone. The research population targeted was from areas where the questionnaire, in many cases, would not have reached the correspondents by post and where certain questions posed would have required an explanation to ensure that the interpretation of the question is fully understood. Neuman (1991) states that the telephonic interview is a popular survey method as about 95% of the population can be reached by telephone. Babbie (2004) remarks that sometimes respondents will be more honest in giving answers especially socially disapproved answers if they do not have to look you in the eye. Du Plooy (2001) agrees that the fact that respondents do not have time to think about their answers can increase the control over and the accuracy of respondents.

The data was analysed with the help of a data analyst and the software package SPSS Version 14. Secondary data was obtained through a literature review of relevant publications and sources from libraries and the internet, which was used in the compilation of the questionnaire for the survey.

### **3. Sample population**

The sample population comprised of respondents that were part of the original Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) mentoring programme. The population was classified according to two geographic profiles obtained from the ECDC. A total number of 34 possible respondents were identified comprising of 22 emerging contractors or mentees, 10 mentors or consultants and 2 service providers who provided the academic training component of the programme. 27 constituents of the entire research population were sampled utilising availability as a sampling method and this formed the basis for the data analysis and the drawing of subsequent conclusions. It should be noted that some members of the population were not contactable or had left the industry. A number of the respondents, mentors as well as the training providers requested that the results be made available to them, underscoring the importance of the study. Leedy & Omrod (2004) provide guidelines for the identification of a sufficient sample and for a small population of less than 100, in which case the target population requires no sampling.

### **4. Survey results**

The perceptions of the respondents were measured on the basis of a five point Likert type scale. The five points were scaled as: 1 = Very low or poor; 2 = Low or below average; 3 = Average; 4 = High or above average, and 5 = Very high or excellent.

The data was analysed firstly by exploring the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The demographics section is sub-divided into descriptives and cross-tabulations. The descriptives' section examines the frequency scores of the variables town, gender, age, home language, total experience in the building industry, total experience in management, highest qualification, as well as personal involvement.

Secondly, the data was examined through the compilation of descriptive and inferential statistics. In terms of descriptive statistics, the variables, namely literacy, need for mentoring, need for training, effect of training and mentoring as well as the need for monitoring,

were examined through a mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. Findings in terms of descriptive statistics were prepared by a means comparison with sub-grouping of the variables, variable 1: training and mentoring, and variable 2: literacy and the effect of training and mentoring.

#### 4.1 Sample population and response rates

Table 1 illustrates the composition of the sample population and the response rates.

Table 1: Sample population and response rates

Designation	Sample population		Response rate	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Training service provider	2	5.9	2	100.0
Mentors	10	29.4	10	100.0
Emerging contractors	22	64.7	15	68.2
Total	34	100	27	79.4

An overall response rate of 79.4% was achieved, which included a 100% response rate relative to both the training service providers and mentors, but only a 68.2% response rate relative to the emerging contractors. 79.4% is a relatively high overall response rate and therefore the findings should provide a true and accurate reflection of the prevailing status.

The respondents all originate and are resident in the Eastern Cape and although spread throughout the rural areas, it is notable that the two major urban areas, Port Elizabeth and East London, had an equal representation of 29.6%. The majority of respondents (74.1%) were male and the remaining 25.9% female, reflecting the distribution in an environment that has historically been dominated by males. Of the respondents, 33.3% were within the 35-44 age category closely followed by the age group 45-54 (29.6%). The age group 34 and below were represented by 18.5% of the respondents.

Cross-tabulations of demographic data were used to highlight some correlations between descriptive demographic variables. Cross tabulations were conducted relative to gender and age, gender and personal involvement, personal involvement and home language, and experience in the building industry and personal involvement.

## 4.2 Home language and form of involvement

14 of the 15 contractors were Xhosa speaking, compared to 1 Afrikaans speaking contractor (Table 2). This indicates that the emerging contractor programme is addressing the needs of previously disadvantaged individuals.

Table 2: Home language relative to form of involvement

Language	Form of involvement (No.)		Total
	Mentor / Consultant	Contractor	
Xhosa	2	14	16
Afrikaans	3	1	4
English	7	0	7
Total	12	15	27

## 4.3 Experience and form of involvement

The majority of the mentors had more than 15 years experience in the building industry (Table 3). This indicates that the mentors should be considered capable as they possess the requisite experience. Most of the contractors had less than ten years experience in the building industry, whereas only 2 contractors had more than ten years experience, which clearly indicates that the correct people are being mentored.

Table 3: Experience per form of involvement

Years experience	Form of involvement (No.)		Total (%)
	Mentor / Consultant	Contractor	
0-5	0	3	11.1
6-10	2	6	29.6
11 – 15	2	2	14.8
16–20	1	3	14.8
21 +	7	1	29.6
Total	12	15	100.0

## 4.4 General literacy and skills of emerging contractors

The questionnaire addressed the general literacy and competencies of the emerging contractors and the findings indicate that the general literacy pertaining to reading and writing was of an acceptable standard, the mean score of 3.56 being > 3. Although cross-cultural communications (4.11), interpretation of building plans (3.30), and management and administration of building sites (3.04) achieved

mean scores above 3, interpretation of bar charts (2.67) and financial management (2.67) did not. This clearly indicates the lack of critical skills in terms of managing projects and also the business of construction, and that the emerging contractors lack, or need financial skills and programming skills. Furthermore, the mean score relative to management and administration of building sites (3.04) is marginally above 3, which indicates a need for enhancement of this skill.

#### 4.5 Need for training and mentoring

The need for training in financial management was identified as the greatest, with a mean score of 4.11, further supported by the fact that not a single respondent scored a 1 relative to this skill. Furthermore, the standard deviation was the second lowest of all the elements, indicating that there is low dissent among respondents relative to this skill. This need was closely followed by training in construction programmes and bar charts (3.74), and training in the interpretation of building plans (3.63). Although, the management and administration of building sites has a mean score of 3.44, there is a need for training relative thereto. Given that the reading and writing mean score is 3.00, this skill can be deemed to be the one requiring the least enhancement.

As expected, that in terms of the need for mentoring there is a strong correlation with the need for training, with scores ranging from 1, a very low need for mentoring, and 5, a very high need for mentoring. However, the need for mentoring in financial management (3.89) was identified as the greatest. This is further supported by the fact that not a single respondent had scored a 1 relative to the skill. As with the need for training in financial management, the standard deviation was the second lowest of all the elements, indicating that there is low dissent among respondents relative to this skill. This need was closely followed by the need for mentoring in interpretation of bar charts and follows the same trend as in the case of training. Table 4 indicates that with the exception of reading and writing, overall there is a need for mentoring relative to all the skills.

Table 4: Need for mentoring

<i>Mentoring pertaining to</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Reading and writing	27	1	5	2.67	1.27
Interpretation of building plans	27	1	4	3.48	1.01
Interpretation of bar charts	27	1	4	3.85	0.91

Management and administration of building sites	27	1	4	3.48	1.01
Financial management	27	1	4	3.89	0.97

#### 4.6 Effect of training and mentoring

With the exception of reading and writing, the mean scores for all the skills were above 3.00, which indicates that the training and mentoring can be deemed to have enhanced the respective skills (Table 5). The mean score relative to reading and writing, which scored significantly lower than the other skills, indicates where training and mentoring had the least effect. However, previously cited statistics indicated that there was not a major need for improvement relative to this particular skill.

Table 5: Effect of training and mentoring on skills

<i>Skill</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean score</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Reading and writing	27	1	5	2.63	1.18
Interpretation of building plans	27	1	4	3.07	0.78
Interpretation of bar charts	27	1	5	3.30	0.87
Management and administration of building sites	27	1	4	3.11	0.97
Financial management	27	1	4	3.04	0.71

#### 4.7 Need for monitoring

The need for monitoring, which includes continuous training and mentoring, achieved a very high mean score, namely 4.37. Monitoring can be deduced to be extremely important since the intervention makes an overall difference in the sustainable performance of contractors. However, 88.8% of the respondents perceived monitoring to be of the utmost importance reinforcing the deduced need therefore. The continuous monitoring of mentees, especially after the completion of the training and mentoring programme will ensure that the programs are having the desired effect on the mentees and the building industry.



#### 4.8 Summary of the findings

Figure 1 provides an overview of the findings. It is important to remember that in terms of interpretation of the graph, that the mean scores relative to the level of literacy / skill and the effect of training and mentoring (Ef/TM) should be the inverse of those relative to the need for mentoring and training.

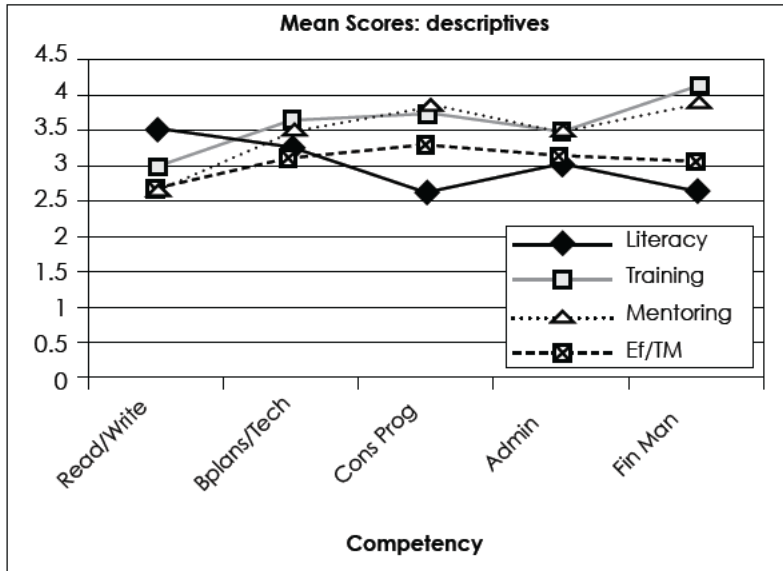


Figure 1: Mean scores – Descriptive statistics

With the exception of literacy (reading and writing), the level of skill relative to all other skills, namely average to low, indicates the need for training and mentoring relative to these skills. Where the mean score is high, thus indicating a high level of skill, the inverse, a low mean score indicating a low need for training and mentoring occurs, and vice versa.

The greater the difference between the average mean score of literacy / skill and effect of training and mentoring, and the average mean score of the need for training and mentoring, the greater the need for training and mentoring relative to that skill, since this is indicative that the proficiency is low and that the need for training and mentoring is high.

## 5. Conclusions

An enormous amount of money is spent on training and mentoring programmes by government and other role players in the industry. The results of the survey indicate that for the programmes to have the desired effect, the following recommendations should be considered by the implementation agencies or institutions that are involved with training and mentoring in the construction industry:

- All facets of the training programme should be covered and are equally important to the success of the mentees;
- More time should be spent relative to financial management and cost control on a building project;
- Trainers and mentors should ensure that the emerging contractors, after completion of the programme, have the ability to not only read and interpret the construction programmes, but have the ability to develop and understand construction programmes or bar-charts themselves;
- Mentors should dedicate more time to the mentoring of emerging contractors relative to administration and management of a building site, and
- Institutions or implementing agencies that administer training and mentoring programmes should budget for the monitoring of emerging contractors to ensure the successful completion of a sustainable programme.

A lack of funding should not be seen or used as an excuse not to train and mentor emerging contractors. The growing economy, which fuels the building industry, requires the delivery of projects to requirements, which needs to be achieved using sustainable contractors, emerging contractors included. However, this can only be achieved through substantial investment in the training and mentoring of emerging contractors. Sustainability of these contractors can further be ensured by the funding and implementation of monitoring programmes after completion of mentoring programmes to ensure that the initial investment is secured for the industry.

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