



# **DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF PROJECT AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

MURENDENI LIPHADZI and CLINTON AIGBAVBOA

*Dept of Construction Management & Quantity Surveying, University of Johannesburg,  
Johannesburg, South Africa*

The construction industry is one of the major industries in South Africa. Like any other industry, strong leadership is vital for its growth. Moreover in order to stay competitive, South African construction firms must find a way to train their project and construction managers to become competent leaders in their specific disciplines. It is to this end, that the study presents findings on how leaders can be developed in the South African construction industry. The data used in this research were derived from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary data was collected via a detailed review of related literature. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire aimed at 150 projects and construction managers in the South African construction industry. From the 150 distributed questions, only 110 questionnaires were received and subsequently data based on the received questionnaire which was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that, education and qualification can help develop leaders in the South African construction industry. This was followed by leadership training courses, taking responsibility, new challenges, and internal motivation, professional and personal development. The study explores leadership and leadership development in the South African construction industry. The study presents a robust background about the construction industry and the importance of leadership.

*Keywords:* Leadership, Project management, Leadership development, Development strategies.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Construction industry is a key sector in every country as it is heavily interconnected with the economy as a whole. It affects, and is affected by; the gross domestic product of a nation. Moreover, the government policies directly affect the construction industry. The construction industry is dependent on different types of input such as human capital, financing and products from other industries. This makes leadership and management important. Without leadership a group of human beings quickly degenerates into argument and conflict because they see things in different ways and lean towards different solutions. Leadership helps to point us in the same direction and harness our efforts jointly.

Moreover most leadership definitions assume that leadership is a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over others in order to guide, structure and facilitate organizational activities and relationship (Yukl 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2002) understand leadership as a process, which ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from

themselves and others. Leaders feel, are credible, inspire a shared vision, and enable others to act, model the way and recognize their employees' contributions. According to Havenga (2002), leaders empower others to make decisions. The aim of the study is to have an understanding in developing leaders within the construction industry, and further find out important factors of leadership development. The study will present findings on leadership development in the South African construction industry.

## **2 WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

If one word could describe the essence of construction management, it is responsibility. Thus, project leaders are responsible for all that happens in a project. This doesn't mean that the project leader should or could do everything associated with the project. However, it does mean that they have ultimate responsibility for the project. In other words, the buck stops with the project leader. It is also evident that the construction industry has a greater need for leadership than arguably any other industry. Many reasons support this notion and it is evident in the nature of the construction projects, and constructed products (Hillebrandt 2000). Undoubtedly, construction projects are large and technically complex and they involve a combination of specialized skills. Thus, the construction teams are not only large but are also multi-disciplinary and the members are from several different construction disciplines and this makes leadership important in this industry.

## **3 LEADERSHIP IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

Allen and Roberts (2011) states that leadership development is a continuous, systemic process designed to expand the capacities and awareness of individuals, groups, and organizations in an effort to meet shared goals and objectives. Hence, it is important to develop leadership in the construction industry. According to Toor and Ofori (2008), development of leadership in the construction industry is a trip which requires fixed attention. In Addition, Toor and Ofori (2008) stated that leaders are born or can learn to lead however, it is important for modern leaders in the construction industry to take initiative and make future construction leaders. Moreover, leadership training and leadership development is paramount in the construction industry.

Nowadays, the construction industry faces a difficult environment of socio-economic, cultural, political, and business challenges, and it is important to note that effective leadership can help minimize the challenges (Toor and Ofori 2008). Therefore, effective leadership interventions should help to accelerate the development of new leadership. The construction industry will be more successful if we can develop leaders who can have an understanding of skills, knowledge and characteristics needed of an effective project leader. Moreover, certain construction companies have now considered the importance of developing its employees for improving their competitive and dynamic abilities (Moore 2006). It is also important for the project leaders to develop originality, initiative, leadership and ethical standards. In addition to insuring good problem solving techniques, decision making method and technical competencies are keys to leadership development.

Jarad (2012) suggested that the potential sources of leadership development include observing, mentoring or coaching by seniors, reading or self-study, education courses during university, education courses since college, company training, and job experience. Bogus and Rounds (2006) suggest that employees can be better leaders from self-education, attending seminars, reading, watching, experience, and from having active organizational mentors.

In addition, Jarad (2012) is of the view that construction organizations can develop leadership and management skills by developing a culture of teaching, mentoring, self-study, and frequent

job changes. Companies can also use their own professional personnel to offer formal leadership and management training. Leadership development initiatives set the stage for organizational success by empowering employees to develop their skills and competencies. It improves retention, provides a foundation for succession planning and trains the next generation of leaders to focus on how managers lead, develop and partner with their employees.

#### **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology considers the context of the research and the desired results in order to achieve meaningful research outcomes. Moreover, the selection of an appropriate research design involves several steps, beginning with identifying the problem, purpose of the study and in depth literature review. This research adopted a quantitative approach which involved the use of a questionnaire.

Burns and Grove (1993) describe quantitative research as a formal, systematic process that describes and test relationships and examines causes among variables. In addition, Polit and Hungler (1993) were of the view that quantitative research can be used to obtain information from a sample of people by means of self-report, whereby people respond to a sequence of questions posed to them by the researcher. The data used in this paper were derived from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through the questionnaire survey method through the use of a purposive sample, targeting the project and construction managers; while the secondary data was derived from the review of literature and archival records. Respondents had to rank the importance of table 1 on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, whereby 1 is strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Moreover, 9 factors were used to develop the elements of construction leadership development.

The questionnaire survey method was decided upon for this study because of the following reasons: they require less time and energy to administer and they offer the possibility of anonymity because the respondent's names are not required on the completed questionnaires. The questionnaire in relation to leadership development consisted of the following sections; ways to develop leaders in construction and leadership development factors that are important to developing construction leaders.

The analysis for this paper was based on the collected questionnaires and from the 150 questionnaires sent out, 110 were received representing a 74% response rate. This was considered adequate for the analysis based on the assertion by Moser and Kalton (1971) that the result of a survey could be considered as biased and of little value if the return rate is lower than 30–40%. Table 1 was analysed via a percentage and table 2 used mean rankings.

#### **5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Respondents were asked to rank methods and ways that can help develop leaders in the South African construction industry (See Table 1). Results obtained include the following: Education/skill/qualifications (89% of the respondents), leadership training courses (73.4% ranked 2nd), taking responsibility (72.5%), new challenges (55%), inspiration from within the current leadership (54.1%) and clear guidelines or direction by current leadership (51.4%). Financial benefits and rewards were ranked last as a way that can develop leaders (42.2% ranked 7th).

Given that it is the subordinates within firms who market, create products, make decisions and sustain construction projects, the development of human resources is vital to the success of the construction organization. Literature reviewed indicated that leadership development is a continuous, systemic process designed to expand the capacities and awareness of individuals,

groups, and organizations in an effort to meet shared goals and objectives (Allen and Roberts, 2011). Jarad (2012) was of the view that, the primary purpose of most leadership development interventions was to improve individual managerial skills and on-the-job performance.

In addition, Jarad (2012) was of the view that construction companies can develop leadership and management skills by developing a culture of teaching, mentoring, self-study, and being exposed to new challenges.

Table 1. Ways to develop leaders in the construction industry.

	No/%	Rank
Education / skills / qualifications	N=97 (89.0%)	1
Leadership training courses	N=80 (73.4%)	2
Taking responsibility	N=79 (72.5%)	3
Learn new skills that will enhance capability.	N=62 (56.9%)	4
New Challenges	N=60 (55.0%)	5
Inspiration from within the current leadership	N=59 (54.1%)	6
Clear guidelines or direction by current leadership	N=56 (51.4%)	7
New experiences	N=55 (50.5%)	8
Financial benefits, rewards and incentives	N=46 (42.2%)	9

Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with regard to leadership development factors (See Table 2). Results obtained include the following: Internal motivation is required to develop yourself as a leader ( $\bar{x}$ -Mean = 4.32; R-Ranked=1), on-going personal and professional development ( $\bar{x}$ =4.12; R=2), it is important for someone to demonstrate leadership skills in order to be promoted to a leadership position ( $\bar{x}$ =4.11; R=3), succession planning and strategy ( $\bar{x}$ =4.10; R=4), it is important for a leader to have formal leadership training ( $\bar{x}$ =4.07; R=5) and personal gains have an impact on developing leaders ( $\bar{x}$ =3.63; R=6). Leadership development must be a priority for both an individual and an organization, moreover developing leaders requires patience, vision and commitment.

Literature review indicated that the first step in developing a leadership development strategy is to determine why the organization believes that this is a strategy that should be pursued, in other words, what it hopes to achieve with the strategy, moreover leadership development initiative cannot be successful unless it clearly targets a specific business goal (Jarad 2012). Bogus and Rounds (2006) suggest that employees can be better leaders from self-education, attending seminars, reading, watching, experience, and from having active organizational mentors.

Table 2. Leadership development factors Leadership development factors.

	$\sigma$ X-SD	$\bar{x}$ -Mean	R
Internal motivation is required to develop yourself as a leader.	0.667	4.32	1
On-going personal and professional development.	0.683	4.12	2
It is important for someone to demonstrate leadership skills in order to be promoted to a leadership position.	0.649	4.11	3
Succession planning and strategy.	0.701	4.10	4
It is important for a leader to have formal leadership training.	0.832	4.07	5
Personal gains have an impact on developing leaders.	0.956	3.63	6

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

There is a dire need to develop leadership skills of construction project leaders in the South African construction industry. Regardless of the fact that majority of the respondents agreed to

having attended leadership development trainings, literature revealed that the development of leaders in the construction industry is a trip which requires fixed attention. Literature further revealed that leaders can be developed by self-education, attending leadership seminars, job experience, being coached and mentored.

From the survey results obtained from the respondents, it was observed that education and qualification can help develop leaders in the construction industry. Leadership training courses followed education. Taking responsibility and starting new challenges were some of the important factors. Moreover, internal motivation, professional and personal development, succession planning and strategy were seen as vital. It is worth noting that few respondents chose financial benefits as significant to helping them improve as a leader, yet companies use this as the most common way to retain and reward leaders.

## References

- Allen, S. J. and Roberts, D. C., Our Response to the question: Next steps in clarifying the Language of Leadership Learning, *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 5. (2), 65-70, 2011.
- Bogus, S. M. and Rounds. J. L., Incorporating leadership skill development in construction training programs, *Proceedings of the 2nd Specialty Conference*, 2006
- Burns, N. and Grooves, K. G., *The practice of Nursing Research Conduct, Critique and Utilization*. Second Edition, Philadelphia: WB Saunders Company, 1993.
- Havenga, R., *The new leadership challenge: Teaming principles with practices in times of change*. Management Today, 2002.
- Hillebrandt, P. M., *Economic Theory and the Construction Industry*. 3rd Edition, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- Jarad, G. H., *The construction manager leading characteristics for the success of construction projects in the Gaza Strip*, Master's Thesis, The Islamic university of Gaza, 2012.
- Kouzes, J. M. and Posner, B. Z., *Leadership challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Moore, J., Where do you start with leadership development, *Development and Learning in organizations* 18(5):7-9, 2006.
- Polit, D. and Hungler, B. P., *Essentials of nursing research. Methods, appraisal and utilization*. 3rd edition. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1993.
- Toor, S. R. and Ofori, G., Leadership for future construction industry: Agenda for authentic leadership', *International Journal of Project Management*, 26. (6): 620–630, 2008.