



Mentee and Mentor traits for Establishing and Sustaining Mentorship: Perspectives from the South African sugar Industry

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Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 10th November 2015, revised 19th January 2016, accepted 24th January 2016

Abstract

Mentorship in South Africa (SA) has the potential to equip black emerging farmers with the necessary skills required to farm successfully. However, for mentorship to be successful, among other things, mentors and mentees should have some attributes that enhance and help them nurture mentorship relationships. This paper uses 2010 data from a sample of 43 emerging black sugarcane growers and 11 mentors in three KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) sugar growing regions and seeks to report on (i) demographic characteristics of the surveyed sugarcane growers, (ii) respondents' views on competences required for establishing and sustaining mentorship, and (iii) identify policy implications. The sample NFGs were mostly male and the surveyed mentors operated relatively large farms and had substantial number of years of experience in sugarcane farming. Nearly 50% of the surveyed NFGs placed more emphasis on soft skills, as one of the significant mentor competences that could enhance mentee-mentor relationships. The sample NFGs also highlighted technical skills such as mentor's success and substantial farming experience as some of the traits that help mentors establish and sustain successful mentorship interventions. Mentors suggested mentee traits relating to initiative and self-drive. These study results imply that there are generic competencies that mentors and mentees should possess or should be helped to develop before and during mentorship. The results also suggest that mentorship is interdisciplinary in nature and successful interventions may require input from different experts. Policy makers therefore, need to do detailed analysis of participants' competencies beforehand and empower those that require such.

Keywords: Mentorship, Land reform, Competence, Mentor, Mentee.

Introduction

Mentorship and agricultural advisory services are back on the international development agenda and undergoing a much-renewed focus. In the South African (SA) context, emphasis on improved mentorship, agricultural extension and other support services emanates from the introduction of various policy initiatives by the new African National Congress (ANC) government, post 1994, particularly land reform. Land reform in SA is a broad policy initiative, which is aimed at redressing some of the injustices created by the apartheid government. However, such reform initiatives have in some cases, led to the emergence of a large pool of new and inexperienced black farmers from diverse backgrounds. Due to some segregations created by the former apartheid regime, previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs) were excluded from actively participating in the land markets. PDIs are defined here as people in South Africa who were previously excluded from land markets due to racial segregation. For that reason, the PDIs predominantly practiced subsistence agriculture in the rural areas and mainly on tribal land. As a result, some of the PDIs who acquire farms through the government's land redistribution program do not possess some key skills required to successfully engage in commercial farming. This has therefore, compelled the state to institute formal mentorship as one of the ways of

integrating new entrant farmers into commercial agriculture and addresses their inherent skills gaps.

According to the Kwa Zulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (KZNDAEA)¹, a mentorship relationship is either between an experienced farmer/s (mentor/s) and an inexperienced farmer/s (mentee/s) or between a strategic commodity partner and a mentee/s. A commodity partner in the SA sugar industry could be THE South African Canegrowers' Association (SACGA). Accordingly, mentorship further promotes sustainability of the land reform program by equipping emerging farmers with the vital skills and knowledge required to engage and succeed in commercial farming. However, Hall and Kahn (2002 cited by Clutterbuck²) caution that in order for individuals to engage in successful mentorship relationships, they should have both the desire and competences to do so. According to Lane (1997) cited Clutterbuck², "**competence**" is a consistent, observable and measurable ability to perform a defined task or an element of a task. Hence, successful mentee-mentor relationships require competent individuals in order to enhance the achievement of mentorship functions (*i.e.* career and psychosocial). Additionally, mentorship relationships occur in phases/stages³. Participants therefore, need to have the necessary competencies they may

require to manage each phase. This paper therefore, seeks to report on the i. socioeconomic characteristics of the surveyed sugarcane growers, ii. respondents' views on competences required for establishing and sustaining mentorship and iii. identify policy implications and make some recommendations.

An overview on mentor and mentee competences: Mentoring does not just happen. Mentors and mentees need to develop specific competences for their interactions to be effective, as observed by Lewis G.⁴. According to Terblanchè⁵, a mentor is a person who guides another (mentee) to avenues of success because he is knowledgeable and respected in a certain field. On the other hand, a mentee is someone who is being mentored. Accordingly, mentors and mentees should show specific qualities (attributes) and characteristics (traits) as reported by Terblanchè S.E.⁵. Some important competences for mentors recommended by⁴⁻⁶ include: strong interest in developing others; being a good motivator (inspires mentee); ability to manage mentee's learning process; being an achiever who sets goals, continuously evaluates them and strives to attain them; and respect others and shows regard for another's wellbeing.

Terblanchè⁵ further noted that other key qualities that a mentor should possess include: patience; emotional intelligence; a good reputation to help others; effective managerial skills; a questioning outlook; persistence; non-autocratic approach; honesty; a desire to help; and self-confidence. Megginson *et al*⁷ enjoined that emotional intelligence is a very important feature that could enable mentors to understand how to deal with the emotions involved in a mentoring relationship. Following⁸, the authors noted that emotional intelligence involves five important skills (Table-1).

Table-1
Keys skills of emotional intelligence

Skill	Description
Self-awareness	The ability to recognize and understand own moods, emotions and drives, and their effect on others; promotes self-confidence and realistic self-assessment.
Self-regulation	The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods; promotes trustworthiness and integrity,
Motivation	A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status; promotes a strong drive to achieve, optimism and organizational commitment.
Empathy	The ability to understand the emotional make-up of other people; promotes expertise in cross-cultural sensitivity and good service to customers
Social skill	The ability to manage relationships and build networks; promotes expertise in building and leading teams

Source: Goleman⁸

However, Clutterbuck² caution that defining mentor competences might be complicated due to the fact that mentorship relationships are both *situational* (mentor responds to mentee's need/s) and *temporal* (relationship evolves over time). Hence, the mentor must be competent to manage the relationship at different stages. Kram³ identified four stages of mentee-mentor interactions; i. *initiation*, ii. *cultivation*, iii. *separation* and iv. *redefinition*. Mentees, on the one hand should exhibit traits such as outlined by Terblanchè⁵ which include eagerness to learn new skills/ knowledge and develop existing skills and abilities; ability to work as a team player; willingness to put time and effort into the relationship; willingness to move out of comfort zone; positive attitude; commitment and self-confidence. Similarly, mentees may also need or develop these competences at different stages of the relationship. More significantly, having the required competencies may enhance the achievement of mentoring functions (Table-2).

Table-2
Career and psychosocial functions of mentoring

Career Functions	Psychosocial/Supporting Functions
Sponsorship Exposure and visibility Protection Coaching Challenging assignments	Role-modeling Acceptance and confirmation Counseling Friendship

Source: Kram³

Methodology

The study uses 2010 data from a sample of 43 emerging black sugarcane growers, also commonly known as new freehold growers (NFGs) and 11 mentors in three KwaZulu- Natal (KZN) sugar growing regions, namely: the North Coast, the Midlands and the South Coast. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the study data. A random sample of 70 NFGs was drawn population of 291 emerging black growers in KZN. Attempts were made to maintain a representative sample. However, a major challenge that faced the researcher during data collection was the unwillingness of the majority of the NFGs to be interviewed. The growers' unwillingness to be interviewed was partly due to the fact that they felt that the NFG mentorship programme was not beneficial. As a result, fewer NFGs and mentors, than originally planned were surveyed. The surveyed mentees (were as follows, the North Coast (22), the Midlands (15) and South Coast (6). Mentors were the North Coast (5), the Midlands (3) and South Coast (3).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics for the sample NFGs: Table-3 shows that the majority (81.4%) of the sample NFGs were male and most of them from the North Coast region. Fifty percent of the surveyed females NFGs participated in mentorship up to the end and the rest discontinued. On average, the sample NFGs

participated in mentorship for nearly six months. The average age of the sample NFGs was 51.51 years, with the youngest being a 26 year old male from the Midlands and the oldest 72 years old (i.e. a male from the South Coast. The mean ages per region were 49.13, 59.50 and 50.95 years for the Midlands, South Coast and North Coast, respectively. These results suggest that age is an important determinant of participation in mentorship. Relatively younger growers (as in the Midlands and the North Coast) tend to favour mentorship because they are less experienced in sugarcane farming. The results are consistent with previous results^{9,10}.

Descriptive statistics for the sample mentors: The mean years for the surveyed mentors were 46.67 years, with the oldest from the Midlands (Table-4). On average, the sample mentors farmed about 736 ha, with a minimum of 115 from the North Coast. The mentors' maximum number of years of experience in managing a sugarcane farm was 42 years, with an average of nearly 21 years. These findings imply that age, farm size and prior experience in sugarcane farm management are important factors for a good mentor. Relatively older growers may have substantial years of experience in cane farming, operate relatively larger farms and thus, have the potential to be good mentor. The results are consistent with Enshayan K. et.al.¹¹.

Table-3
Surveyed NFGs' socio-economic characteristics by region, 2010

Characteristic	KZN (n=43)	Midlands (n=15)	South Coast (n=6)	North Coast (n=22)
Mentorship participation status and duration				
Fully participated (number)	9	5	0	4
Discontinued (number)	15	1	3	11
Never participated (number)	19	9	3	7
Mean participation duration (months)	6.29	4.93	1.83	8.52
Mentorship participation status and gender distribution				
<i>Male NFGs</i>				
Fully participated (number)	5	1	0	4
Discontinued (number)	11	0	3	8
Never participated (number)	19	9	3	7
Total number male NFGs (number)	35	10	6	19
<i>Female NFGs</i>				
Fully participated (number)	4	4	0	0
Discontinued (number)	4	1	0	3
Never participated (number)	0	0	0	0
Total number female NFGs (number)	8	5	0	3
Mean age (years)	51.51	49.13	59.50	50.95
Minimum (years)	26	26	45	32
Maximum (years)	72	70	72	70

Source: Survey data, 2010.

Table-4
Surveyed mentors' socio-economic characteristics by region, 2010

Characteristic	KZN (n=11)	Midlands (n=3)	South Coast (n=3)	North Coast (n=5)
Age				
Mean (years)	46.64	53.00	50.67	47.00
Minimum (years)	39	45	42	39
Maximum (years)	66	66	58	56
Farm size				
Mean (ha)	735.73	1570.00	864.00	158.20
Minimum (ha)	115	380	392	115
Maximum (ha)	3500	3500	1800	248
Sugarcane farm management experience				
Mean age (years)	20.91	30.00	19.00	16.60
Minimum (years)	6	20	15	6
Maximum (years)	42	42	25	25

Source: Survey data, 2010.

Mentee and mentor suggested competencies: The surveyed NFGs' suggested mentor competencies were grouped into three categories namely; *hard/technical*, *soft* and *other skills* (Table 5). Nearly 50% of the respondents noted that mentors should have *soft skills* (good communication, empathy, patience, trustworthy, honest and reliability), with the majority of them (about 26%) emphasizing empathy and ability to teach others. About forty-four percent of the surveyed growers identified being successful and substantial farming experience, being a dedicated multi-skilled problem-solver as the *hard skills* that mentors should possess. These findings are consistent with previous results^{4,5,6}.

Notwithstanding that, about 7% of the respondents were of the view that mentors should be from the local area/region and fully support the mentorship strategy. These results show that in order for mentorship of emerging growers to be effective, mentors need not to have technical skills only. *Soft skills* are also required to nurture and build a good mentor-mentee

relationship. Further, choosing mentors in the growers' area/region promotes accessibility of the mentor/s to mentee/s and reduces distance and costs when mentors visit mentees or *vice versa*. More importantly, mentors need to have bought-into and fully support the mentorship strategy for the programme to achieve its desired outcomes.

On the contrary, the sample mentors suggested mentee competencies relating to mentee initiative and self-drive (Table-6). Nearly twenty-seven percent of the respondents were of the view that the mentees should be serious about farming and cooperate with the mentor. More importantly about 9% of the surveyed mentors respectively indicated that mentees should be i. hard-working, interested in farming and willing to learn and ii. cooperative and have a vision for own farm business. Further, mentees should also trust and cooperate with the mentor, be patient and have good business acumen. These findings are consistent with⁵.

Table-5
Mentor competencies suggested by the surveyed NFGs, 2010

Attributes/Traits Category	Attributes/Traits	Total (n=43)
Hard/Technical Skills	Successful and substantial experience in cane growing	15 (34.5)
	Dedicated problem-solver	2 (4.7)
	Multi-skilled and experienced	2 (4.7)
Soft Skills	Good interpersonal skills	3 (7.0)
	Empathy and ability to teach others	11 (25.6)
	Trustworthy, honest, patient and consistency	2 (4.7)
	Good communication skills	3 (7.0)
	Reliable	2 (4.7)
Other Skills	From local area or region	1 (2.33)
	Fully supports mentorship strategy	2 (4.7)
Total		43 (100)

NB:numbers in parenthesis represent percentages. Source: Survey data, 2010.

Table-6
Mentee competencies suggested by the surveyed mentors, 2010

Attributes/Traits	Total (n=11)
Serious about farm work and cooperates with mentor	27.3 (3)
Interested in farming, assertive, cooperative and willing to learn	18.2 (2)
Self-motivated, hard-working and approachable	9.1 (1)
Patient, willing to learn and have basic financial knowledge	9.1 (1)
Hard working, interested in farming and willing to learn	9.1 (1)
Patient, have good business acumen and self-motivated	9.1 (1)
Trust mentor, willing to seek advice and implement it	9.1 (1)
Be cooperative and have vision for own farm business	9.1 (1)
Total	11 (100)

NB:numbers in parenthesis represent percentages. Source: Survey data, 2010.

Conclusions

The sample NFGs were mostly male. The surveyed mentors operated relatively large farms and had substantial number of years of experience in sugarcane production. The majority of the

surveyed NFGs placed more emphasis on soft skills, as one of significant mentor competences that could enhance mentee-mentor relationships. These soft skills include good communication, empathy, patience, trustworthy, honest and

reliability. Further, the sample NFGs also noted that technical skill such as successful and substantial experience, being a dedicated multi-skilled problem-solver are some of the mentor traits that could help them establish and sustain successful mentorship interventions.

These study results imply that there are some generic competencies that mentors and mentees should possess or should be helped to develop before or during the mentee-mentor relationship. The results also suggest that mentorship is interdisciplinary in nature and successful interventions may require input from different experts. Further, perhaps worth noting is the fact that the surveyed mentees cited soft skills (*i.e.* often overlooked) important for nurturing and sustaining mentoring relationships. Policy makers therefore, need to do detailed analysis of participants' competencies beforehand and empower those that require such.

In addition, this study paves way for potential future research work. Identifying the mentee and mentor competencies that may enhance mentoring relationships provides an opportunity for further investigating the specific skills and traits required for each mentorship stage. Other studies can also investigate the relationship between mentee and mentor traits and the attainment of mentorship functions. Furthermore, future studies could explore some environmental factors that impact on the success of mentorship relationships.

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