

Recruiting from the retired pool - a viable option to addressing SA's acute skills shortage



The South African labour market is plagued by an alarmingly high unemployment rate and an overwhelming skills shortage. The youth labour force is becoming increasingly vulnerable with an unemployment rate of just over 66%, and South Africa's newest job market hopefuls are hardest hit by dwindling work opportunities, compounded by a lack of skills and experience that make it almost impossible to take up the limited opportunities available to them. One way to combat the spiralling unemployment rate is to recruit skills from the retired labour force. Retired professionals possess the skills and experience to temporarily step into vacancies that would otherwise be difficult to fill and can ensure the transfer of skills to their younger, greener counterparts.

Experience is everything

In the mining, engineering, and construction sectors particularly, experience is a key requirement that companies look for when placing a candidate in a high-level role. These industries tend to hire fewer unskilled employees. So how do younger individuals gain experience in these industries if no one is willing to hire them, because they have no experience? By bringing back much needed skills from the retired pool. For example, by using ratios of one retiree to three semi-skilled or unskilled younger employees, companies can work on closing the skills gap and reducing the unemployment rate by ensuring that younger employees receive experienced mentorship and guidance from industry veterans.

Hybrid approach to skills development

Mining companies often have short-term, onsite projects aimed at improving their operations or

expanding into new realms. Such a scenario is ideal for establishing a hybrid model of hiring seasoned talent from the retired pool and pairing it with skilled and semi-skilled younger talent. A reliable Temporary Employment Services (TES) provider is perfectly positioned to assist businesses in these risk-intensive sectors to find the right candidates from the retired pool to lead their short-term projects. While no level of experience can prevent all catastrophes on the job, issues can be quickly and safely rectified by junior-level employees with the right oversight from their senior counterparts.

Old-school skills and experience

One of the main benefits of recruiting from the retired labour force is bringing back skills that would otherwise be unavailable in construction, engineering, and mining. Given the global skills shortage, as well as the current brain drain, these skills must be brought back into South Africa somehow. By hiring mature individuals, companies gain access to their established skill sets, in addition to gaining access to that individual's existing database of working relationships and industry networks. Such networks and relationships can be useful to tap into when dealing with suppliers, stakeholders, and colleagues on-site.

Inter-generational skills transfer

Retired individuals generally have between 20 – 40 years of experience in their chosen industry. This experience is currently untapped when individuals are no longer actively employed. Placing such skilled individuals in positions where they can mentor upcoming talent is a critical method of ensuring that their experience, knowledge, and skills is not lost entirely. Having seasoned mentors is essential for ensuring skills transfer in an environment that allows younger individuals to put into practice the knowledge they have gained. Furthermore, having seasoned individuals in charge of projects in the construction, engineering and mining industries is an enormous contributing factor in stakeholder and investor confidence. Those putting their money into big projects feel more secure that there is experience at the helm, and this is likely to lead to even more projects simultaneously or further down the line.

Timing is critical

As for the type of skills that need to be brought out of retirement, there is currently a severe shortage in experienced engineers, site managers, project managers as well as quantity assessors and particularly higher-level individuals in construction, engineering, and mining. Level-headed individuals who are responsible for driving entire projects are urgently required. It is not necessary to employ such individuals full-time, and they can still enjoy their retirement while working on a reduced-hours or part time basis. This also means that skills are not brought back at a huge expense to the client. For example, where a project is for five years, it is possible to contract a retired individual for the first year. Thereafter, once the skills transfer has taken place and the younger counterparts are more confident in their abilities, it is possible to pass the torch entirely.

Short-term solution to long-term skills development

The biggest advantage in working like this is the ability to start projects immediately and hit the ground

running. The skills are there, and we can tap into them without delay. From an organisational perspective, having such mentorship and skills transfer from an older generation to the younger generation can assist hugely with staff retention. Where younger individuals feel they are learning useful skills and can see a progression in their career path, they are less likely to seek opportunity elsewhere. Ultimately, in the face of a deepening skills crisis, it will be necessary to find creative solutions to develop the skills we need, with the talent we have. Bringing back critical skills from retirement is just the sort of creative solution that South Africa's economy needs right now.