

# The role and responsibilities of leaders in SA's construction industry

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29 Dec 2023

The construction and infrastructure development sector is a key driver of economic reform and growth in South Africa. As such, those in positions of leadership in construction are not only influential within the sector, but are key voices for change in the country as a whole.



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According to Statistics South Africa, South Africa's construction sector is currently the fifth largest employer in the country, employing more than 1.35 million people. But these numbers only reflect direct employment within the industry, where construction creates employment and economic opportunities throughout supply chains, from suppliers and service providers to regulatory bodies and financial institutions – all of which are affected by decisions made by industry leaders.

Today, the industry is growing from strength to strength, having weathered the obstacles created by the pandemic such as supply chain and project disruptions. But as we look to the future, we also need industry leaders to step up and take actions which will ensure our sector and its participants continue to thrive in the coming years.

## Supporting smaller construction businesses

Beyond managing companies that are influential in their own right, leaders in construction and infrastructure development have a responsibility to reach out and guide smaller businesses, which in turn can add significantly to the country's GDP and employ more people through their activities.

Major developers with deep footprints in the country such as Gap Infrastructure Corporation (GIC) possess a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and resources that smaller developers, especially small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMME), urgently require to be successful. As such, GIC actively works with our contractors, providing support and training.

As industry veterans, we understand the intricacies, challenges, and strategic complexities inherent to the sector. We can, for example, teach young entrepreneurs how to apply for tenders, quote correctly, and apply effective accounting practices. We can further provide guidance on long-term business strategies, offer feedback on specific projects, and help them network within the industry.

To create an even greater impact, construction leaders can additionally aid SMME construction businesses in accessing advanced technologies, skilled labour, or capital from their own resources or from external sources, thereby stimulating their growth.

## **Addressing skills shortages**

The construction industry is evolving, with a growing focus on innovative construction methods that also emphasise sustainability and green practices. At GIC, we understand that as we adopt fourth-industrial revolution technologies and building techniques, our workers at every level of the organisation will require training in new and modern building and engineering practices.

Growing demand for advanced and specialised expertise will further aggravate critical skills shortage that South Africa is already experiencing. For example, research by the Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying at the University of Johannesburg found that there was an artisan shortfall of some 46,000 people just a few years ago. More recently, the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation noted that at least 60% of school graduates will need to pursue trade training to close the country's skills gap.

Construction industry leaders have the ability, authority, and influence to initiate internal training programmes and internships which can upskill both our workers and unemployed job-seekers looking to enter the industry. This will allow interns to gain practical experience and give them the opportunity to gain long-term employment within the sector. This will also provide companies with access to a pool of higher-skilled employees.

Additionally, larger companies can partner with tertiary technical institutions that provide industry-specific training, providing employees and interns with access to formal learning opportunities, and giving learners from these vocational schools an opportunity to gain on-the-job experience at some of the partner company's active sites. Moreover, as GIC, we partner with institutions to supply learnership and scholarship programmes.

Ultimately, the future of South Africa's construction and infrastructure development, and the livelihoods of the many families that rely on its success, is not the sole responsibility of the government – we must all play our part. We have a duty towards our sector, its workers, and the people we serve to drive development and to improve the quality of deliverables that we bring to market.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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