Recruiting and keeping women and mining: the way forward

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# ABSTRACT

Challenges and opportunities for the mining industry are attracting and keeping qualified young women and men in all areas of work. This study aims to show how internal informal and formal structures have hindered personnel retention. The purpose is to help mining organizations recruit and retain qualified workers, promoting longevity and reducing costs coupled with unnecessary personnel turnover. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with mine personnel in northern Europe. The participants consisted of women and men in blue-collar and white-collar professions, including managers.

Within workgroups and workplaces, i.e., underground, there is a culture where new employees are accepted into the group and taken care of. Although at the same time, the new employees are expected to prove themselves by learning the job and being able to be a part of the “team”. As demonstrated by previous research, the requisite to demonstrate proficiency is especially directed at women entering male-dominated professions. Our results further add to this knowledge by adding an additional informal hindrance between management and blue-collar workers—especially those who have made the jump from the mines to leadership positions tend to make things “tougher” for younger colleagues, to show them how tough things were for them. Blue-collar women experienced being further questioned by managers, especially since women managers were much tougher on female workers. Questioned proficiency led to women of lower range feeling not accepted nor competent enough, even though they were fully competent in their groups, which led to a much higher turnover.

The results show that formal structures such as laws, internal regulations, and even the workplace climate promote a positive work culture for a gender-balanced workplace within workgroups and departments but that informal structures and gendered ideals of who is a competent worker reproduce gender inequality and masculine ideals.