

## IMPACT OF TRAINING ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

*School management is a complex process that requires committed and visionary leadership. A school principal is charged with the responsibility of managing school physical facilities, staff personnel, school finance, the curriculum, students and school-community relations. The major problem addressed by this study is that of lack of adequate training for principals to effectively carry out these managerial functions. The study sought to find out whether principals receive any training on project management, and whether such training has any influence on effectiveness of principals in school management. The research design adopted in the study is the descriptive survey. The sample for the study constituted 20 public secondary school principals in Kirinyaga District, Kenya. The study utilized a questionnaire and an observation schedule for data collection. The study established that training plays a significant role in project management performance. The principal can be looked at as a project manager, one who is expected to plan, implement, manage, maintain and evaluate the entire education system: physical facilities, human resource, students, financial inputs and the curriculum. As such, there is need for adequate preparation of school heads in project management.*

**Keywords:** Project management, training, school management

### INTRODUCTION

School management is a complex process that requires committed and visionary leadership (Bush, 2007). A school principal is charged with the responsibility of managing school physical facilities, staff personnel, school finance, the curriculum, students and school-community relations (Kelechukwu, 2011). As such, the school principal acts as a project manager. Project management processes are normally divided into initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing processes (Prabhakar, 2008). Within the education setting, to these processes are added some more, so that, as Olembo (1992) and Okumbe (1998) noted, the complex work of principals is categorized into the following areas: planning, staffing, organizing and controlling, co-ordination, influencing and motivating, consulting and communicating and evaluating. Many studies have been conducted on project management in organizational settings. The major problem addressed by this study is that of lack of adequate training for principals to effectively carry out these managerial functions. According to Sindhvad, (2009) school principals by virtue of their position are responsible for control and coordination of instructional programmes within the school setting. For this to succeed, proper training in project management and/or management-related courses is of great importance.

If we look at a principal as a project manager, one expected to plan, implement, manage, maintain and evaluate the entire education system – physical facilities, human resource, students, financial inputs and the curriculum – then we see the need for adequate preparation of school heads in project management. Yet as noted by Odhiambo (2005), most teachers are

promoted to head schools without initial training in school management. Writing about school principals in Kenya, Onderi and Makori (2013: 69) argue that the lack of effective preparation of school heads leaves them feeling like they are “balancing at the top of the grease pole” and as if they are “left to swim or sink.”

Effective execution of school management tasks requires that principals be adequately trained. However secondary school principals in Kenya are appointed from serving teachers (Okumbe, 1998). As Olembo (1992) and Okumbe (1998) noted, little orientation is given as to the nature of the work they are supposed to do as education programme managers. Hence, this may be the reason why most schools in our country have stalled projects, dilapidated structures, and register poor academic performance. It is not an easy task to measure the effectiveness of project management in a school setting. This, according to Okumbe (1998), is mainly because different schools have different financial capabilities, and resource distribution in different schools varies. As such, the study measured principals’ perceived effectiveness in project management. The purpose of the study was to find out the impact of training on project management among principals in secondary schools in Kirinyaga District of Central Province in Kenya.

### **Project Management in an Organization**

According to Project Management Institute (2000), project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to a broad range of activities in order to meet the requirements of the particular project. The Institute further notes that project management knowledge and practices are best described in terms of their component processes. These processes can be placed into five Process Groups – Initiating, Planning, Executing, Controlling and Closing – and nine Knowledge Areas – Project Integration Management, Project Scope Management, Project Time Management, Project Cost Management, Project Quality Management, Project Human Resource Management, Project Communications Management, Project Risk Management, and Project Procurement Management (Project Management Institute, 2006). The term “project management” is sometimes used to describe an organizational approach to the management of on-going operations (Lucia & Richard, 1999). They further note that this approach treats various aspects of on-going operations as projects in order to apply project management techniques to them. Project management focuses critical attention on the interdependent nature of complex tasks – an action, or failure to take action, in one area will usually affect other areas (Lucia & Richard, 1999).

### **Project Management Competence**

A competent professional is generally understood to be someone who can do the job (Kumar & Prasad, 2013). Competence in a profession is consistently meeting the objective criteria for performance on the job (Ireland, 2004). It is generally agreed that the overall scope of competence these three areas: knowledge, skills and attitude. To start with, knowledge is one aspect of competence. According to Ireland (2004), knowledge consists of the general and specific project management theory, concepts, practices, procedures, processes, and methodologies that apply to an industry and the complexity of projects being conducted. The project manager (PM) must first possess knowledge of the technical aspects of the industry to an extent that he or she understands the product and service being built and delivered.

The second aspect of competence is skill. Skills are the application of knowledge to project work that ensures accomplishment of the work in an effective and efficient manner (Ireland, 2004). Katz (1974) proposed that managers need three critical skills in managing: technical, human, and conceptual skills. Technical skills are the job-specific knowledge and techniques needed to proficiently perform work tasks. These skills tend to be more important for first-

line managers because they typically are managing employees who use tools and techniques to produce the organization's products or service the organization's customers (Robbins & Coulter, 2012).

Human skills involve the ability to work well with other people both individually and in a group. Managers with good human skills get the best out of their people. Human skills are demonstrated in the way a manager relates to other people, including the ability to motivate, facilitate, coordinate, lead, communicate, and resolve conflicts (Daft, 2012). Finally, conceptual skills are the skills managers use to think and to conceptualize about abstract and complex situations. Using these skills, managers see the organization as a whole, understand the relationships among various subunits, and visualize how the organization fits into its broader environment (Robbins & Coulter, 2012).

Attitude as the third aspect of competence is the personal and professional demeanour exhibited by a person while performing his or her work (Ireland, 2004). He notes that attitude includes drive, energy, good instincts, and dedication. In the context of competence, this would be a positive outlook and an ability to not take one's self too seriously. A project manager must demonstrate the correct attitude when working with all the project stakeholders, e.g., project team, senior management, customer, and special interest groups (Ireland, 2004).

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The major objective of this study was to find out the nature of school management training received by principals of public secondary schools in Kirinyaga District of Central Kenya. The study further sought to find out the relevance of such training to project management and whether training influences effectiveness in management of school projects.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized the descriptive survey research design. A survey, according to Groves, Fowler, Couper and colleagues (2004), is a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purposes of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members. According to Kothari (2004) the major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. The descriptive survey was the most appropriate for this study because in the study, the researcher collected information on the state of affairs in the schools, without manipulating any variables. The sample for the study constituted public secondary schools in Kirinyaga District, Kenya. Stratified random sampling was employed to select twenty schools, ten of which were headed by male principals and ten headed by female principals schools. The study participants were the twenty principals from the twenty secondary schools, among them ten (50%) male and ten (50%) female. Sixteen (80%) of the principals were Bachelor of Education degree holders while four (20%) had Diploma in Education qualifications.

### **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The study utilized a questionnaire and an observation schedule for data collection. The questionnaire was used to collect data from principals, while the observation schedule was used by the researcher to observe the nature and state of existing and stalled projects in schools. Observation method was used to ensure the the information obtained relates to what is currently happening; as is not complicated by either the past behaviour or future intentions or attitudes (Kothari, 2004). The researcher observed and recorded information on the existing projects in schools, projects that had stalled and the general use of the school land.

Data analysis procedures employed involved both qualitative and quantitative procedures. Quantitative data was analyzed and reported using frequency distributions, means and percentages. On the other hand, qualitative data was coded and the codes were then categorized typologically in order to identify themes and relationships emerging from the data. Based on identified themes, concepts were developed which helped to arrive at generalized statements (Denscombe, 2007) about the status of school projects.

## FINDINGS

### Nature of School Management Training

The first objective of the study was to find out the nature of management training received by the school principals. The study established that, other than teacher training received at University, the principals had received other forms of training as shown in Table 1. These included school leadership induction courses by the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) (55%), school management courses (30%), information computer technologies (ICT) (15%), financial management (20%) and project management diploma (10%). Two (10%) principals had not received any other training.

**Table 1. Training received by school principals**

<i>Training received</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Induction course by KEMI	11	55
School management course	6	30
Financial management	4	20
ICT	3	15
Project management diploma	2	10
None	2	10

Seventeen (85%) principals had attended management/entrepreneurship training courses (Table 2). The courses however took a very short time ranging between one and two weeks for most principals. Only two principals had attended courses taking one year. Three (15%) principals had not attended any management course.

**Table 2. Proportion of head teachers who had received management training**

<i>No. of head teachers who had received management training</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
No course attended	3	15.0
1 year diploma in management	2	10.0
1 month management course	2	10.0
2 weeks management course	5	25.0
1 week management course	8	40.0

### Relevance of Management Training to Project Management

The second objective of the study was to find out the relevance of management training received by principals on project management. Six (30%) principals reported that the

management courses attended helped them to a high extent in improving their project management skills, while eleven (55%) reported that the training helped them to a good extent. The results (Table 3) showed that 12 (60%) principals felt that they were not competent in project planning, 10 (50%) were not competent in project implementation, 13 (65%) in project evaluation, nine (45) in project scheduling, five (25%) in project control and seven (35%) in budgeting and accounting. The rest of the principals were competent in these areas.

**Table 3. Competencies of principals in project management functions**

<i>Project Management Function</i>	<i>Competent</i>		<i>Incompetent</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Project Planning	12	60	8	40	20	100
Project Implementation	10	50	10	50	20	100
Project Evaluation	13	65	7	35	20	100
Human Resource Management	8	40	12	60	20	100
Project Scheduling	9	45	11	55	20	100
Project Control	7	25	15	75	20	100
Budgeting And Accounting	7	35	13	65	20	100

The principals reported that they needed training in the areas where they felt incompetent. Thus, the training received did not adequately help principals to improve in all areas of their management skills, and especially the following: project control, budgeting and accounting, human resource management, project scheduling, and project implementation.

### **Influence of Training on Project Management Effectiveness**

The third objective of the study was to find out the influence of training on effectiveness of school projects' management. Eleven (55%) principals reported that they had carried out a number of projects up to completion (ranging from 3 - 10 projects). Nine (45%) principals had not carried out any projects to completion (Table 4). The projects carried out to completion by these principals were: construction of laboratories, dormitories, staff houses, toilets and water storage facilities; equipping libraries and laboratories; renovation work; fencing of school compound; purchasing of school buses; equipping computer laboratories; electrification and telephone installation; sinking of boreholes; and woodlot establishment projects.

**Table 4. Number of projects carried out to completion**

<i>Number of projects</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
3	3	15.0
4	2	10.0
5	4	20.0
8	1	5.0
10	1	5.0
None	9	45.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>100.0</i>

The principals had initiated various income generating activities in their schools (Table 4). These activities included farming and woodlots. The schools earned varying amount of money from these activities, with the minimum amount being KShs. 30,000 (approximately \$345) per annum and the maximum earned being KShs 400,000 (approximately \$4,600) per annum.

Seven (35%) principals reported that there were stalled projects in their schools. The projects had stalled due to lack of adequate funds (20%), poor planning (5%), lack of clear vision/mission (5%), and shifting attention to other needs (5%), (Table 5). Observations conducted by the researcher revealed that the only income generating activities practiced in the schools were farming (crops and cattle rearing), which was going on in seventeen schools (85%). The researcher did not find any income generating projects in three schools (15%). Only one of these schools seemed to have no resources (land) that could be utilized for income generation as it was a new school. The other two had large pieces of land that could be utilized for income generation. Eight (40%) of the schools had well equipped computer laboratories that could have been used to offer training courses in ICT to the neighbouring communities, but this was not happening. The schools could also rent out their facilities (halls and buses) to community members especially during school holidays.

**Table 5. Reasons for projects stalling**

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Lack of funds	4	20.0
Poor planning	1	5.0
Lack of clear vision/mission	1	5.0
Shifting attention to other needs	1	5.0

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to find out the nature of school management training received by principals of public secondary schools in Kirinyaga District of Central Kenya. The study further sought to find out the relevance of such training to project management and whether training influences effectiveness in management of school projects. Data for the study was collected from 20 principals sampled from Kirinyaga District among them 10 male and 10 female respondents respectively.

The study found out that majority of the principals had received other forms of training including headship induction courses by the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), school management courses, information computer technologies (ICT), financial management and project management diploma. Of these, most principals had attended courses related to management/entrepreneurship, which however took a very short time ranging between one and two weeks for most principals. Only two principals had attended courses taking one year.

The study revealed that less than half the principals reported that the management courses attended helped them to a large extent in improving their project management skills, while more than half reported that the training helped them to a good extent. The training received by principals did not adequately help them to improve in all areas of their management skills,



and especially in project control, budgeting and accounting, human resource management, project scheduling, and project implementation.

On the aspect of embarking on projects to the end, the study revealed that slightly more than half the principals carried out a number of projects up to completion (ranging from 3 to 10 projects). Less than half the principals had not carried out any projects to completion. Lesser principals reported that there were stalled projects in their schools due to lack of adequate funds, poor planning, lack of clear vision/mission, and shifting attention to other needs.

Further, the principals reported that the only income generating activities practiced in the schools were farming (crops and cattle rearing), which was going on in seventeen schools. The researcher did not find any income generating projects in three schools. Eight schools had well equipped computer laboratories that could have been used to offer training courses in ICT to the neighbouring communities, but this was not happening. The schools could also rent out their facilities (halls and buses) to community members especially during school holidays.

In conclusion, it emerged that training plays a significant role in project management performance as stated by Sondhavad (2009). The principal can be looked at as a project manager, one who is expected to plan, implement, manage, maintain and evaluate the entire education system: physical facilities, human resource, students, financial inputs and the curriculum. As such, there is need for adequate preparation of school heads in project management. Yet as noted by Odhiambo (2005), most teachers are promoted to head schools without initial training in school management. The study findings revealed that most principals had not received adequate training, which confirms Odhiambo's (2005) observation. Lack of adequate training especially affected principal in project control, budgeting and accounting, human resource management, project scheduling, and project implementation. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1996) cited in Bush and Jackson (2002) refers to the connection between quality leadership and school effectiveness stating that, "the head...plays the most crucial role in ensuring school effectiveness" (p.417). One of the ways of ensuring that such a role is effectively carried out is through preparing and continuously developing those principals. There is need for preparation and development of principals for school leadership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that principals in schools be trained on project management to improve their competence in management of school-based projects. Such training should consist of the general and specific project management theory, concepts, practices, procedures, processes, and methodologies that apply to the industry and the complexity of projects being conducted. Teacher training organizations such as the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI), the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), the Teachers' Advisory Centres (TACs) and Universities should design courses for all principals in these areas. KEMI programmes should be decentralized to the County level and if possible mechanisms should be put in place to decentralize it further to the school level as was recommended by the Sessional Paper number 1 of 2005 (Republic of Kenya, 2004). KEMI programmes should take longer than two weeks rather than the current exhaustive training which is seen as crash programmes by participants. As a result, not much learning and understanding takes place to enable principals apply lessons learnt in their schools because so much is covered within a very short period. The Ministry of Education should also find ways of forming linkages and collaboration with the private sector and non-governmental organizations to help in preparation and development of principals for project

management by allowing them to offer in-service courses for potential principals and serving principals. Principals should be encouraged to take personal responsibility and initiative in preparing and developing themselves for school project management through self-study, reading literature, researching on the internet, attending seminars and workshops regularly. Newly appointed principals can benchmark at schools with experienced and successful principals for induction and mentoring.

The Ministry of Education ought to look into ways of subsidizing the training fee KEMI charges school principals because some schools are unable to raise the fee which disadvantages some principals who would have liked to attend those courses. Alternatively, schools should have a vote head for preparation and development of principals to ensure that finances for courses are always available whenever need arises. Principals need to use the resources they have more efficiently so as to generate more income to supplement current sources of finance. Schools should maximize the utilization of resources such as land to generate a greater proportion of the school budget from such economic activities and to improve the financial status of their schools.

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