

Project Management Training: A Determinant of Project Implementation by Grass-root Support Non-Governmental Organizations in Embu County, Kenya

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Abstract- This Literature Review intended to highlight Project Management Training as a determinant of project implementation by Grass-root Support Non-Governmental Organisations in Embu County, Kenya. The reviewer had studied grass-root support NGOs with projects in the fields of Agriculture, Micro-Finance, Education, Health and Nutrition and found that majority of staff in these organisations did not have any basic training in Project Management. Findings from various studies have indicated that organizations in diverse industries have embraced Project Management but the implementation process remains a challenge, resulting in well-formulated strategies failing at the implementation stage because of a myriad of factors ranging from unrealistic expectations, poor methodology, poor requirements, inadequate resources, poor project management, untrained teams, unrealistic budgets, to poor communication and more. Despite many studies having been done on success factors of projects, they were very general due to the multidisciplinary nature of projects, which acquire different and varied meanings

depending on the field in which they are applied. Few studies have been specific to

Project Management Training as a factor, as it was largely assumed that all projects were the same, yet effective Project Implementation may require different approaches which are acquired through training. An organization may have the best plans, great resources, a strong team, but without knowledge and skills of implementation through sound Project Management training there is no project. This review intends to reduce the knowledge gap in the area of crucial project management training factors affecting implementation of projects.

Index Terms- Mentoring, PM Coaching, Problem solving, Project Management Training, Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

One can hardly find organizations that do not try to follow the practice of successful project management mentoring and project

staff training because the modern competitive environment dictates to organizations to have educated and skilled employees who can do daily tasks and perform project activities with less time and money consumed. Through practicing project management mentoring and training, any organization can direct and coordinate its human and material resources throughout the project life-cycle to accomplish established goals within the scope, expected quality, time and budget, while meeting expectations of the stakeholders (Wong, 2013). Excellence in planning and implementing projects will be achieved if the organization owns training personnel that has earned project management certifications and accomplished project management certificate programs.

II. THE PROCESS

The process of project staff training refers to a complex of measures to educate project team members. There are three stages for developing skills and abilities of project staff: Tutoring, Coaching and Mentoring. Typically, tutoring in projects refers to a process of educating project staff through teaching them and enhancing their skills and knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Project management tutoring tends to make project staff more educated by showing the basics of project planning and management. It is the first stage of the project staff training process aimed at creating the fundamental knowledge about projects and the basic processes of project management. Tutoring often includes organization of project management classes, seminars and meetings to educate project staff.

Coaching is a method of project management training focused on developing competency and skills of project staff through providing team members with professional advice and help. This project

management training method assumes implementing a complex of tools for goals setting and results tracking that “raise the bar” upon completion of the preset goals. A PM Coach regularly reviews and updates the goals and then assigns project management classes and seminars in order to educate team members and move them towards achieving desired results (van Kessel, 2006). Project management coaching is the second stage of the project staff training process.

Staff mentoring is a complex of relationships between the mentor and the team. The mentor works on unlocking the factors required to let the team develop, generate creative solutions and find new ways to succeed in performing projects. Project management mentoring is the third stage of the project staff training process giving the most effective education tools to organize project management e-learning and plan for staff mentoring courses and online workshops (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The major benefits from implementing PM mentoring and training courses are many:

The team becomes more skilled in less time. The team can create new insights and discover new knowledge in the field of managing projects. The team gets access to people, project mentoring workshops, training sessions and other learning opportunities. Mentoring improves skills and competency of project team members. Mentors can hone their skills and enhance academic guidelines, becoming more effective. Mentor communicates with the mentee receiving feedback. Mentors and staff trainers will become more skilled at providing qualified help.

More sophisticated hybrid education processes will greatly assist to develop adaptable project managers and leaders. The stronger blend of academic and practitioner concepts embedded within a language of PM

develops richer insights into the soft and hard skills required to be effective and efficient project managers in an increasingly complex world. Project managers and leaders who can reflect more deeply on their own project experiences will develop their own capabilities (Biggs & Tang, 2011). In doing so, they will become more capable of constructively leveraging the collective abilities of their team members and building the capabilities of their organisations. Embedding the language of PM practice into an experiential learning environment that necessitates application of theories as they are being learnt, with reflection about their impact, increases the relevancy of the learning and retention of the knowledge. According to Bredillet, Conboy, Davidson and Walker (2013), the students exposed to this approach, so far, have been highly appreciative of the learning experience and have indicated it is a more engaging and effective way to become better project professionals.

Training is the process of transmitting and receiving information to problem solving (Nadeem, 2010). Sackman (2006) sees training as any process concerned with the development of aptitudes, skills and abilities of employees to perform specific jobs with a view to increase productivity. An organisation may have employees with the ability and determination, with the appropriate equipment and managerial support yet productivity falls below expected standards. The missing link in many cases is the lack of adequate skills, and knowledge, which is acquired through training and development. According to Bredillet et al. (2013) the purpose of training is mainly to improve knowledge and skills, and to change attitudes or behavior. It is one of the most important potential motivators which can lead to many possible benefits for both individuals and the organization. Changing technology requires that

employees possess the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to cope with new processes and production techniques. Bredillet et al. (2013) further argued that training brings a sense of security at the workplace which reduces labor turnover and absenteeism is avoided; change management training helps to manage change by increasing the understanding and involvement of employees in the change process and also provides the skills and abilities needed to adjust to new situations; Provide recognition, enhanced responsibility and the possibility of increased pay and promotion; Give a feeling of personal satisfaction and achievement, and broaden opportunities for career progression; and help to improve the availability and quality of staff. According to Woodhead (2011) no matter how carefully job applicants are screened, typically a gap remains between what the employee does know and what they should know.

An organization which desires to gain the competitive edge in its respective industry, needs among other things, extensive and effective training of its human resources. Training is therefore a key element for improved organizational performance; it increases the level of individual and organizational competences. It helps to reconcile the gap between what should happen and what is happening between desired targets or standards and actual levels of work performance. Although many employers continue to have reservations about the cost and extent of tangible business returns from training, the development of skills has been identified as a key factor in sharpening competitiveness. According to Shuttleworth, (2008), the economic and technological trends, the pace of innovation, change and development are growing faster year-by-year and as a result, provide clear signals that training and development are so relevant that both

organizations and individual stakeholders must give a serious attention to.

III. EFFECT OF VARIOUS TRAINING METHODS

The selection of method for training need to be based on identified training needs, training objectives, an understanding on the part of the trainees, the resources available and an awareness of learning principles. Critten & Critten (2008) explained that the most popular training methods used by organizations can be classified as either on-the-job or off-the-job. On the job training is the most widely used training method in comparison. It is simple and less costly to operate. Observing this method critically, the training places the employee in actual work situations and makes them appear to be immediately productive (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The disadvantages are that the senior worker is not usually trained in the skills and methods of training therefore it can be a process that may be time consuming as a new comer struggles to cope with the senior worker's explanations. Far more successful is to use a senior or experienced worker who has been trained in instruction or training method and whose teaching skills are coordinated with a developed program linked to off-the-job courses. Here, there is a close collaboration between trainer and learner.

There are three common methods that are used in on-the-job training and these are; learning by doing, mentoring and shadowing and job rotation. A variety of methods could be adopted to carry out a training needs analysis (Cicmil et al. 2009b). Job analysis, interview with managers and supervisors and performance appraisal are methods commonly used. Despite the available

variety of methods, an organization has to be cautious when selecting training methods for its use. A careful use of training methods can be a very cost-effective investment. Although one of the most important stages in the training process, monitoring and evaluation, is often the most neglected or least adequately carried out part.

Mentoring is another version of the system whereby a senior or experienced employee takes charge of the training of a new employee. This suggests a much closer association than master/apprentice and elements of a father/son relationship can exist whereby the mentor acts as an advisor and protector to the trainee (Nixon et al. 2012). Here, some of the methods used in the assessment centers include business games, in-basket, simulation, problem-centered cases, and many others, to enable the trainee learn the behaviors appropriate for the job through role-playing. The use of behavior modeling is based on social theory, and it is in particular an effective method for interpersonal or social skills training. This method of training incorporates the use of videos to clearly demonstrate the way things ought to be done, what behaviors are to be avoided. Behavior modeling is often based on the demonstration of the right and effective way to behave and as a result, trainees are provided with facilities to practice this. Roberts, (2013) asserts that behavior modeling is where target behaviors are selected and videos on each of the behaviors produced, showing competent persons achieving success by following specific guidelines. Key points are displayed on screen and are backed by trainer-led discussions. Learning here is trainer enforced through role play.

Job rotation is another version of training that became popular in the 1970s to help relieve boredom and thereby raise the productivity of shop floor workers. It is a

management technique used to rotate incumbents from job to job or from department to department or from one plant to another in different geographical areas. The rotation is done on co-ordinate basis with a view to exposing the executives and trainees to new challenges and problems. It is also aimed at giving executives broad outlook and diversified skills.

Training Policies

Scores of Literature available on training indicate that traditionally, training in an organization involved systematic approach which generally follows a sequence of activities involving the establishment of a training policy, followed by training needs identification, training plans and programs design and implementation, evaluation and training feedback for further action. Johnson *et al.* (2008) makes a point that to enhance employee performance, companies should have different policies for training depending on the class or level of employment or level of employees to be trained. They pointed out that training policies are necessary for the following reasons: To provide guidelines for those responsible for planning and implementing training; to ensure that a company's training resources are allocated to pre-determined requirements; to provide for equality of opportunity for training throughout the company; and to inform employees of training and development opportunities.

For any enterprise to function effectively, it must have money, materials, supplies, equipment, ideas about the services or products to offer those who might use its outputs and finally people, which is the human resource, to run the enterprise. Reiss (2012) define Human Resource Management as the involvement of all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between

the organization and its employees-the human resources. According to Kelleher (2007), general management make important decisions daily that affect this relationship, and this leads to a map of human resource management territory, the core of which they refer to as the four Cs and these are; competence of employees: high competence creates a positive attitude towards learning and development. Commitment of employees: high commitment means that employees was motivated to hear, understand and respond to management's communication relating to the organization of work. Congruence between the goals of employees and those of the organization: higher congruence is a reflection of policies and practices which bring about a higher coincidence of interest among management, shareholders and workers alike. Cost effectiveness of Human Resource Management practices: means that the organization's human resource cost, that is wages, benefits, training and indirect costs such as strikes, turnover and grievances, have been kept equal to or less than those of competitors. As much as these policies seem to be accurate, they are silent on the elements of budgetary provision and top management support for training. According to Armstrong, (1996), training policies are expressions of the training philosophy of the organization.

IV. QUALITY OF TRAINING AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

The quality of employees and their development through training are major factors in determining long-term profitability and optimum performance of organizations. To hire and keep quality employees, it is good policy to invest in the development of their skills, knowledge and abilities so that individual and ultimately organizational productivity can increase. Traditionally, training is given to new employees only.

This is a mistake as NGO training for existing employees helps them adjust rapidly to changing job requirements. Organizations that are committed to quality invest in training and development of its employees (Evans & Lindsay, 1999). A new hire training program provides a fundamental understanding of the position and how the position fits within the organizational structure. The more background knowledge the new associate has about how one workgroup interrelates with ancillary departments, the more the new associate will understand his or her impact on the organization. Another aspect of a comprehensive employee training program is continuing education. The most effective employee training programs make continuing education an NGO responsibility of one person in the department. This is an important function that will keep all staff members current about policies, procedures and the technology used in the department. A solid new hire training program begins with the creation of an employee training manual, in either notebook format or online. This manual acts as a building block of practical and technical skills needed to prepare the new individual for his or her position (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1997).

Odekunle (2001) argues that much of today's employee training and reference material belongs online these days in a company Intranet. But, if the organization is not ready to embrace the online world, keep the manuals up-to-date and interesting the quality of training was substandard. When possible, in computer training, visual images of the computer screen (multi-media screen capture) to illustrate functions, examples, and how to should be incorporated.

Training Evaluation and Performance

Upon checking the effectiveness of training, Woodhead (2011) stated that the training program should be reviewed during and after its completion by the training officer, the line manager, and if necessary, by the trainees themselves. Evaluation differs from validation in that it attempts to measure the overall cost benefit of the training program and not just the achievement of its laid down objectives. McNamara (2008) advocated that until control measures are taken to correct any deficiencies after the training, evaluation has not been completed and thereby ineffective. Evaluation is an integral feature of training, but it could be difficult because it is often hard to set measurable objectives. He cited some of the methods as follows; questionnaires (feedback forms): this is a common way of eliciting trainee responses to courses and programs. Tests or examinations: these are common on formal courses, especially those that result in certification for instance a diploma in word processing skills.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this review, the reviewer has the following recommendations:

1. Owners of organisations of all types in Embu should put great effort to encourage and ensure they engage staff trained in Project Management to improve their chances of implementing projects effectively.
2. Organisations with staff who specialize in other important areas of management should put in place programmes for training them in basic courses in Project Management.
3. Organisations should put in place effective training policies. This ensures that all workers understand what they are expected to do. This motivates the staff and improves the standards of work ethics, performance and working environment.

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