Project Management in Schools

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New Conceptualizations, Orientations, and Applications

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Introduction

The increasing use of project management tools in organizations in the business and industrial sectors is a global phenomenon. In recent decades, such organizations are facing major pressures due to the consolidation of global markets, increased international competition, and the need to pursue commercial opportunities rapidly (Pinto, 2013). These pressures characterizing modern society in general, and the business environment in particular, fostered the development of advanced methods of management that improve an organization's ability to plan, implement, and control its activities and utilize its people and resources (Meredith & Mantel, 2012). Thus, project management has come to be viewed nowadays as a crucial tool in increasing productivity of organizations and one of the most popular and useful tools for organizations to improve internal operations, respond to opportunities, manage contemporary challenges, and achieve strategic goals (Pinto, 2013). Evidently, there is a rapid increase in the number of organizations that use projects as the preferred way of achieving their goals (Meredith & Mantel, 2012). Nevertheless, in light of a high failure rate of projects, many have criticized the way projects are perceived and managed, as well as the way future managers are taught about projects and about project management in higher education institutions (Kerzner, 2017; Thomas & Mengel, 2008).

As the field of project management has significantly grown, so has its literature, and many books and articles have been published about this managerial tool in recent years (e.g., Soderlund, 2011; Webster, 2014; Wong, 2007). However, contrary to the vast amount of empirical work carried out on project management in business and industrial organizations,

in not-for-profit organizations and specifically in the field of education this area has been left relatively untouched (Ahmed, 2017). Education is a field that is perceived by many to be unique and so context-specific that application of generic business-related terms is generally criticized as neoliberal and a privatization-related measure (Yemini & Sagie, 2015). Nevertheless, proper application of project management methodology in schools at least should be presented to the school leadership team, adding an additional layer to the existing tool-kit of school administrators. It is commonly accepted that education is an extremely complicated field, where measurement of success is not straightforward (Oplatka, 2004; Sellar & Lingard, 2014). In addition, the whole idea of maximizing the profit of the shareholders and issues of organizational efficiency have been loudly contested (Ball, 2012), leaving the managers of projects in schools without appropriate tools.

Unfortunately, no body of literature about project management in schools has evolved over time, leaving this subject far from being conceptualized specifically in educational institutions. Addressing this void is even more crucial as the school context has unique characteristics (Hoy & Miskel, 2008), which call for a separate consideration of many concepts that have come about in business organizations. This situation makes a coherent discussion of project management in schools from a context-related perspective a pressing need.

Given the increasing pressures of decentralization and competitiveness in school environments during recent decades (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2012), the role of school principals and teachers as project managers is receiving growing interest in practical contexts and especially in leadership development programs worldwide. Thus, school principals nowadays are increasing their independence and control of internal matters and decision-making processes, while at the same time facing growing pressures to improve student achievements and meet government-mandated standards (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Inbar, 2009; Lubienski, 2003). These trends have exposed school staff to a complicated array of pressures that impact their work methods and ability to function, but have also provided school leaders with opportunities to act autonomously and initiate changes in their schools. Due to these changes, project management has become a critical tool for schools and therefore adaptation of this discipline in the school context is a matter of the highest priority in current educational systems. It is worth noting, however, that in spite of major reservations concerning the use of project management

methodology in school administration, there is a growing stream of schools that adopt project-based learning and teaching, thus reorganizing the traditional subject-based learning into a holistic module based on a specific topic or project (Lam, Cheng, & Choy, 2010).

As the issue of project management in the school context has hardly been conceptualized and examined, this book provides a comprehensive overview of models and practices of project management in schools, and conceptualizes the processes of adaptation and development of the general aspects of project management curricula within the unique context of the school organization. The book's chapters deal with the complexity and uniqueness of the school environment within the growing implementation of project management in schools. By presenting the general theories and research on project management and adapting these theories to educational organizations and to this specific audience, we hope to open a new and promising niche for teaching, research, and practice.

More specifically, this book has both theoretical and practical contributions. It promotes our knowledge and understanding of project management within the school's contexts and reveals the unique use of project management within schools. In this manner, this book aims to contribute to a better understanding of the process of managing projects within schools and to provide a holistic view of project management within the educational arena. In addition, understanding the complicated case of schools in this context, as we believe, can significantly contribute to the broader theoretical discourse and introduce new practices. From a more practical view, this book may have implications for school principals' and teachers' work and training in the context of the current educational arena. The book provides a deeper knowledge necessary for initiating, implementing, and evaluating projects that can benefit schools and increase their effectiveness and productivity.

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