

An Assessment of Professionalism Level in Project Implementation in Kenya: A Case Study of Thika Municipal Council

Tabitha Gideon

School of Human Resource Development, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and
Technology, P. O. Box 62000-00200, Nairobi, Kenya.
Email: tabbieng@gmail.com

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v3-i10/276>

Published Date: 05 October 2013

Abstract

Implementation of projects is preceded by project planning, plans that are contained in project documentation available in the preliminary stages. These plans include among others, technical proposals, budget plans, risk management plans, plan of action, and quality management plans. Nevertheless project planning is one thing and implementation is another. This study sought to explore how professionalism is connected to the success of project implementation. Literature review was guided by the theory on project management, best practices on implementation, as advanced in the ten factor model which was developed by (Pinto & Slevin, 1988a) in their Project Management Handbook. Thika Municipal Council of Kenya was taken as the case study representing Kenya Government bodies. Our Analysis found out that in general, Professionalism in Kenyan public sector was found wanting especially in the way projects are handled. In particular the research found out that, issues on time management, recruitment and client involvement were not keenly observed.

Our research concluded that practitioners in the government bodies should derive benefit by paying attention to professionalism as advocated by various project-management theories for diverse classes of projects.

Keywords: Professionalism, Project Planning Project Implementation, Project Lifecycle and Project Management.

Introduction

Project implementation, in very general terms, refers to the act of putting into action what was planned. In its simplicity we can say it is, executing plans. Projects have a life cycle (Morris & Pinto, 2010) identified four distinct project life cycle phases which are: Conceptualization, Planning, Execution, and Termination. It continues to expound more on the definitions of these phases.

Conceptualization according to (Morris & Pinto, 2010) refers to the development of the initial goal and technical specification for a project. The scope of work is determined, necessary

resources (people, money, material & machine) identified, and important organizational contributions or stakeholders signed on. This is where Feasibility study is also conducted to investigate whether the project is viable or not. Planning, they say is the stage in which detailed specifications, schematic, schedules and other plans are developed. At this stage the individual pieces of the project called work packages are broken down, individual assignments made, and the process for completion clearly delineated. This is where the project schedule, the actual work and the estimated cost of completion are known. Anything that might pose a threat to the successful completion of the project is also identified at this stage for the sake of risk management. Stakeholders must be identified at this stage of the project so as to establish a communication plan that describes information needed and the delivery method to be used to keep stakeholders informed.

According to (Morris & Pinto, 2010) execution phase which is also called implementation deals with actual performance of the work of the project. Monitored and evaluation is done on the progress to ensure appropriate adjustments are made and variances recorded so as to maintain the original project plan. During project execution, project errands are carried out and progress information is reported through regular team meetings. The project manager uses this information to maintain control over the direction of the project by measuring the performance of the project activities comparing the results with the project plan and takes corrective actions as needed (Westland, 2006). Termination occurs when the completed project is transferred to the customer.

The journey thus starts at conceptualization all the way to termination of the project and it is this journey that makes or breaks project products. What happens such that projects stall, fail to meet some of the intended objectives or even never see the light of the day?

In Kenya, the Local government is charged with among other things serving the local communities through running programmes that are aimed at improving living standards of these locals. The programmes are executed through projects. These projects are planned by project managers through liaising with the communities who are the stakeholders and then acted on, upon the approval of the council.

This study focused on how professionalism affects project implementation and a case study of Thika Municipal Council in Kenya was used.

Problem statement

Government institutions and agencies are known to have plans and documentation for programmes and projects. The Thika municipal council is an example of such institutions and agencies that implement projects, some of which are under the umbrella of Kenyan Vision 2030.

An interview with the Town clerk revealed that projects stalled in their implementation stage, a case in point being the construction of the Thika social hall at Landless, a few kilometers from the town.

The plans were already in place and a contractor hired to do the work, but the construction of the social hall was never done due to politics in project management. The above example is a common case of how many projects are planned but whose initiation or completion never comes. In addition many of the council projects are entrusted to officers who hardly possess the special skills required to handle projects. Awareness of different stakeholder needs is key to any project success, but also the knowledge and skills on how to implement the projects is equally important. The intention of projects stakeholders is to see projects go as planned. However, adherence to project planning procedures is hindered greatly by internal

and external factors. This study sought to establish how professionalism is connected to project implementation as a factor, such that the intended project product's quality is compromised and hence project goals not achieved. Thika municipal council was used as a case study of how good plans end as just good plans.

Objectives

The general objective of this study was to assess the level of professionalism in the implementation of projects as compared to best practices.

Literature Review

This chapter contains literature revealed from a number of published journals and project management books.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This literature was guided by the theory on project management, best practices on implementation, as advanced by (Kerzner, 2004a). In his second edition dubbed Advanced Project Management, Kerzner explores advanced project management topics necessary for implementation of excellence in project management. Some of these topics in his theory include project management methodologies, the concept of the project office, strategic planning, culture, management support among others.

It also borrowed from the theory on project management, best practices on implementation, as advanced in the ten factor model which was developed by (Pinto & Slevin, 1988a) in their book Project Management Handbook.

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

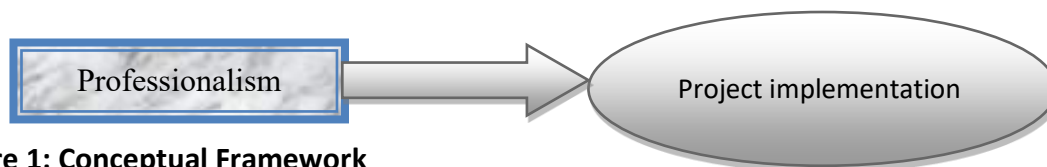


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Best Practices in Project Management

Project management can be defined as the planning, scheduling and controlling of a series of integrated tasks such that the objectives of the project are achieved successfully and in the best interest of the projects stakeholders.(Kerzner, 2004b). According to (Pinto & Slevin, 1988b) the project manager requires the necessary tools to help him or her focus attention on important areas and set differential priorities across different project elements. He also says if it can be demonstrated that a set of factors under the project manager's control can have a significant impact on project implementation success, the project manager will be better able to effectively deal with the many demands created by his job, channelling his energy more efficiently in attempting to successfully implement the project under development.

(Pinto & Slevin, 1988b) came up then with a ten-factor model of the project implementation process. According to this model, there is a defined procedure which shows how a project should be implemented starting with the Project mission, Top Management, Project plans/schedules, client participation, recruitment and selection, and finally client acceptance. In all these they have defined communication to run entirely in the process of project implementation. Monitoring and evaluation is also noted as an essential process during the project implementation. According to the (Snyder, 2013) PMBOK 5th edition on

Professionalism, human resource planning is used to determine and identify human resources with the necessary skills required for project success. According to (Pinto & Slevin, 1988b). The need for adequate communication channels is extremely important in creating an atmosphere for successful project implementation. Communication is not only essential within the project team itself, but between the team and the rest of the organization as well as with the client. Communication here refers not only to feedback mechanisms, but the necessity of exchanging information with both clients and the rest of the organization concerning project goals, changes in policies and procedures, status reports, among others. As an implementation strategy, (Paul, 1987) discusses the importance of user participation in the early stages of the project as a way of improving the likelihood of later acceptance.

Professionalism during project implementation

Oladipo, Adeosun, & Oni (2012) points out that majority of local governments projects today are manned by officials who do not possess the requisite leadership and managerial skills to deliver the gains of democracy to the people. To engage effectively, citizens not only need an awareness of their roles and responsibilities but knowledge and skills on how to execute the responsibilities. Capacity building consists of developing knowledge, skills and operational capability so that individuals and groups may achieve their purposes (OMOLO, 2009). According to (Bertucci & Alberti, 2003) the public service as a profession, should adopt the values of honesty, neutrality, and fairness, among many others. It also should embrace the merit principle in setting up career structures from recruitment to promotions. By running the administrative machinery that supports decision-making and implements the policies and programmes of the government-of-the-day, public servants play an indispensable role in the sustainable development and governance of a nation. Further, as an institution, the public service ensures the continuity of administration between transitions of power, which are the hallmarks of modern day democracy. (Bertucci & Alberti, 2003) accentuates, given these crucial roles, a country expects its public service to demonstrate professionalism and ethics. As noted by (Slevin & Pinto, 1987), an important, but often overlooked, aspect of the implementation process concerns the nature of the personnel involved. In many situations, personnel for the project team are chosen with less-than-full regard for the skills necessary to actively contribute to implementation success.

As stated by (OMOLO, 2009) an examination of both Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan LASDAP and Constituency Development Funds (CDF) shows the critical need for building the capacity of communities. The Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) planning meetings are scheduled for only one day at the end of which communities are required to come up with proposals. This takes place against a backdrop where citizens are ill-equipped to participate in planning. In Malindi Kenya, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the Malindi Municipal Council have a joint collaborative initiative, termed Participation in Partnership (PiP). Under the partnership, CSOs have committed to holding three-day workshops to educate the communities on how to engage in planning. Similarly, within the CDF structures, study findings show inadequate knowledge of project planning, implementation and monitoring processes among communities and the various committee members (IEA, 2006). Before the introduction of the CDF Fund managers, there were high levels of wastage and misappropriation of resources. This was due to poor capacity of the committees to manage the colossal funds disbursed to them (OMOLO, 2009).

Research Methodology

The research design used was descriptive and exploratory. Exploratory research is the discovery of ideas and insights (Kothari, 2004). This design was more preferred as it minimizes bias and allows maximum reliability of information from the project officials. Further, the descriptive approach was chosen for it attempts to describe characteristics of an event, situation, a group of people, community or a population. It describes a given state of affairs as fully and as carefully as possible (Fraenkel, 2000)

Structured Questionnaires were distributed within the council to be filled by top officials including the clerks and Engineers. The researchers chose Top Managers, Specialists (Engineers, Trainers), other staff (clerks, secretaries) and other clients as the target population. The structure of the questions in the questionnaire was both open ended and closed type of questions. Open ended questions allowed respondents to include more information, including feelings, attitudes and understanding of the subject. Introduction letter from the university and a research permit from the council authorities were obtained as attached in the appendices. The research used research assistants who helped in the data collection process.

The data collected from the field was captured using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 16) and Microsoft excel (Microsoft office 2007). Analysis of data involves descriptive statistics including frequency, percentages and means and presented in summary form using graphs, pie charts and frequency distribution tables.

Findings and Discussions
Analysis on Response Rate

Table 1

| Category | Number of questionnaires Issued | Number of questionnaires returned | of Response Rate |
|-------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Respondents | 40 | 37 | 92.5% |
| | 40 | 37 | 92.5% |

This study targeted 40 respondents and 37 of these were duly filled. There was a 92.5% response rate.

Basic parameter information

Age

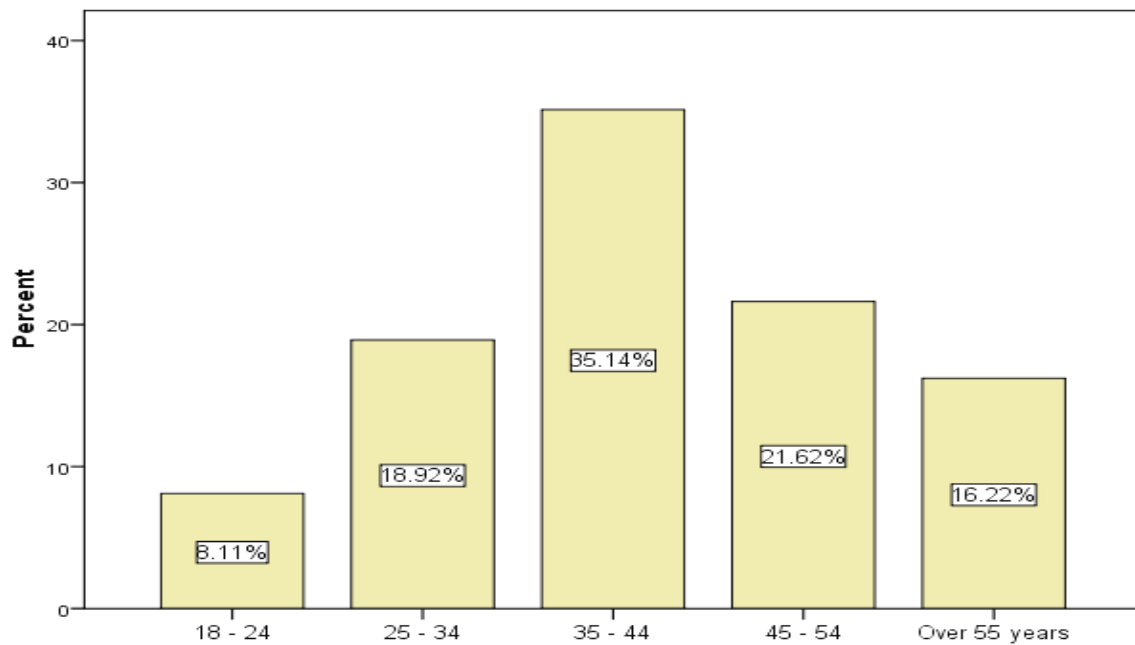


Figure 2

The figure shows that approximately 61.87% respondents were between 18 – 44 years, with only 38% being above 45 years. This is an indication that the productive lot is more than the less productive lot. There is also existence of the experienced personnel (those above 45 years) who can train others.

Gender

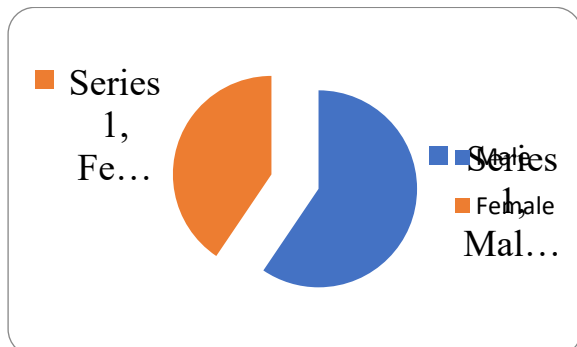


Figure 3

Gender was distributed as shown. Males were higher with 59.46% of the total respondents while female were 40.54%.

Professionalism in Project Implementation

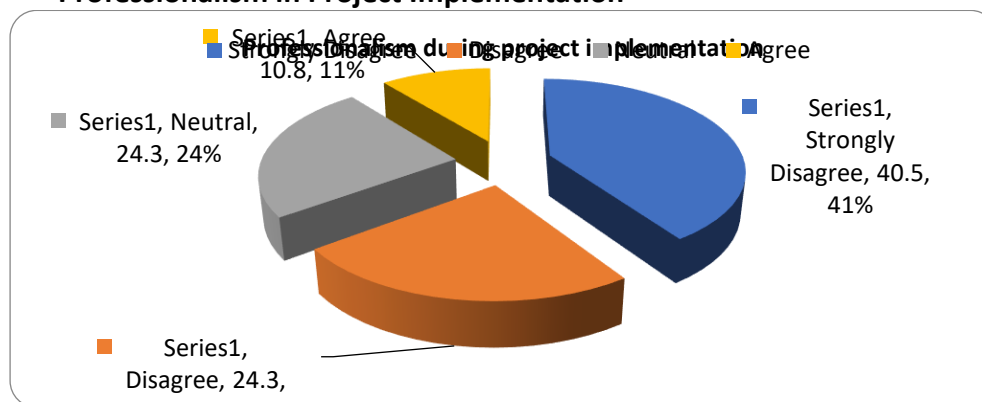


Figure 4

The above figure shows that 11% agree there is professionalism during project implementation in Kenyan public sector while 41 % strongly disagree, 24 % disagree and another 24% were neutral. These percentages reveal that adherence to project management practices such as communication, recruitment and selection, feedback, monitoring and evaluation which in this study were collectively referred to as professionalism were not taken seriously.

Cross-tabulation between the job title and professionalism

Table 2

| Post | | Professionalism during project implementation | | | | Total |
|--------------|------------------|---|--------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | |
| To Managers | Frequency | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Specialists | Frequency | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Other Staff | Frequency | 14 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 27 |
| Total | Frequency | 14 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 37 |
| | Percent | 37.83 | 24.32 | 24.32 | 13.5 | 100 |

As shown above a cross tabulation was done to show the response. “Junior” staff opine that there is generally no professionalism in project implementation. Recruitment and selection of staff and general approach to project management is below par if the findings of this study are anything to go by.

Cross-tabulation between the Gender and professionalism**Table 3**

| Gender | | Professionalism during project implementation | | | | Total |
|--------|-----------|---|----------|---------|-------|-------|
| | | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | |
| Male | Frequency | 8 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 22 |
| | Percent | 36.4 | 22.7 | 22.7 | 18.2 | 100 |
| Female | Frequency | 7 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 15 |
| | Percent | 46.7 | 26.7 | 26.7 | 0 | 100 |
| Total | Frequency | 15 | 9 | 9 | 4 | 37 |
| | Percent | 40.5 | 24.3 | 24.3 | 10.8 | 100 |

There appeared to be a significant difference on how the two genders perceived the issue of professionalism. It could mean that female gender does not feel contented by recruitment and selection; they felt their male counterpart was more favored. The constitution of Kenya, on gender, calls for at least 1/3 majority of either gender in social-economic development.

Content Analysis on Professionalism

This study sought to find out how professionalism is practiced during project implementation. The graph below shows how respondents felt:

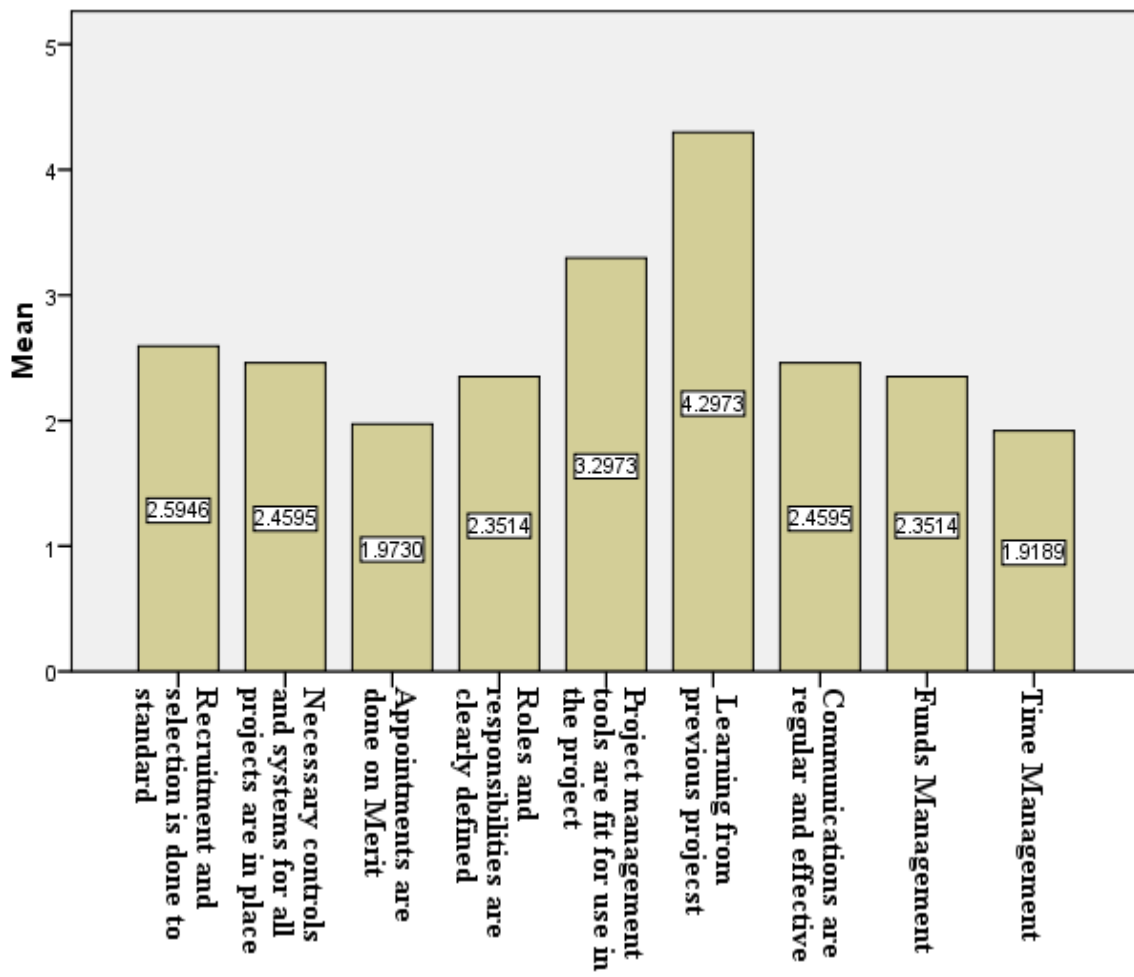


Figure 5

Generally there was no approval of professionalism in the implementation of projects in the council. In particular, the issues of appointment to positions and time management were highlighted as shown above. These findings are consistent with (Oladipo et al., 2012) that identified lack of professionalism in the public sector as a challenge to development.

A correlation between professionalism and Project implementation was done to establish how they related and below were the findings:

Table 4

| | | Project implementation |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Professionalism | Pearson Correlation | .898 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |
| | N | 37 |

This study established that there is a strong positive correlation between professionalism and project implementation which means that the two are inseparable. If professionalism is practiced then implementation is hampered.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The goal of any project manager or indeed stakeholders in a project is to complete it successfully. A project is generally considered to be successfully implemented if it: Comes in on-schedule (time criterion), Comes in on-budget (monetary criterion), Achieves basically all the goals originally set for it (effectiveness criterion). Is accepted and used by the clients for whom the project is intended (client satisfaction criterion) according to (Pinto & Slevin, 1988b). Project plans have a clear implementation structure but bridging the gap between planning and implementation is a challenge. It is inevitable if projects earmarked under the various development projects are to see the light of day.

Public sector is notorious for unsuccessful projects, a problem this study sought to investigate with a particular emphasis in Kenya's public sector and with regard to professionalism. Appointments for specific roles was found wanting and so was recruitment and selection. This was thus found to explain how then project life cycle is affected. A strong correlation of **0.898** meant that professionalism is key during project implementation and can ensure that project lifecycle actually completes successfully.

Recommendation

Appointments to key positions should be done on merit. project management being a relatively new field is lacking professionals with the requisite skills a situation that is made worse by the fact that these professionals may not necessarily be given an opportunity to serve in the area of their training if the findings of this study is anything to go by. Recruitment and selection should be done transparently because best practices demand so. This will help narrow the gap between planning and implementation as is in the current situation in the public sector.

Acknowledgement

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to God who has seen me through this in good health and sound mind.

Secondly I salute my advisor Prof. H.M Bwisa for the continuous support through this study and research, for his patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this article. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for this study. I also sincerely acknowledge my colleagues Gladys, Ken and Monica whose help was highly appreciated.

Corresponding Author

Prof. Henry Bwisa

School of Human Resource Development,
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
P. O. Box 62000-00200, Nairobi,
Kenya.
E-mail: bwihem@gmail.com

References

- Bertucci, G., & Alberti, A. (2003). Globalization and the Role of the State: Challenges and Perspectives. *Reinventing Government for the Twenty-First Century, State Capacity in a Globalizing Society/Randinelli DA, Cheema G. Shabbir (editors).*—Westport, Connecticut (USA): Kumarian Press Inc, 17–31.
- Fraenkel, J. R. (2000). *Educational Research*. Routledge.
- Kerzner, H. (2004a). *Advanced project management: Best practices on implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Kerzner, H. (2004b). *Advanced Project Management: Best Practices on Implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Morris, P., & Pinto, J. K. (2010). *The Wiley Guide to Project Control*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Oladipo, A., Adeosun, O., & Oni, A. (2012). Quality assurance and sustainable university education in Nigeria.
- OMOLO, A. (2009). THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (TISA). Retrieved from <http://www.tisa.or.ke/uploads/Policy-Recommendations-on-Citizen-Participation-TISA-2011.pdf>
- Paul, S. (1987). *Community participation in development projects*. World Bank Washington, DC.
- Pinto, J. K., & Slevin, D. P. (1988a). 20. Critical Success Factors in Effective Project Implementation[^]. *Project management handbook*, 479.
- Pinto, J. K., & Slevin, D. P. (1988b). 20. Critical Success Factors in Effective Project Implementation[^]. *Project management handbook*, 479.
- Slevin, D. P., & Pinto, J. K. (1987). Balancing strategy and tactics in project implementation. *Sloan management review*, 29(1), 33–41.
- Snyder, C. (2013). *A User's Manual to the PMBOK Guide*. Wiley.