Quality Education News

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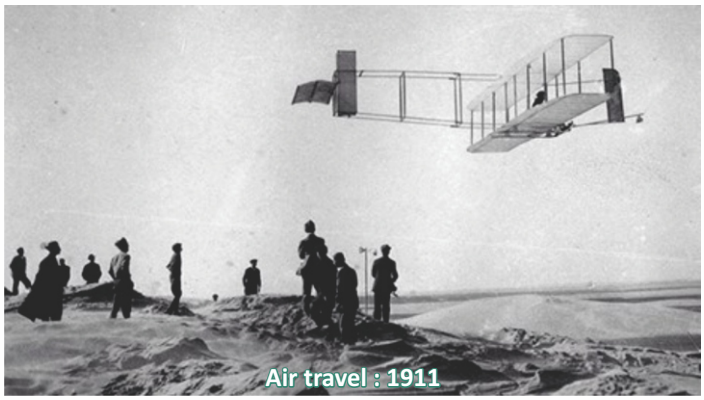
Dear Supporter of Quality Education



Air travel : 1911

Make dreams come true: project management

In the 1911 photo above, Orville Wright was airborne for nine minutes and 45 seconds. He and his brother, Wilbur, made the world's first man-made flight in 1903. That flight lasted only seventeen seconds. Through their projects, the Wright brothers created a new way of travel that has ever since benefitted the world.

The Wright brothers were able to turn their dreams of man-made flight into a reality. We all have dreams. They could be family-related such as getting a son or daughter enrolled at a particular school or university. Professional dreams might be to get a promotion or improve one's teaching qualifications.

Then, of course, there are those dreams about where we work. We imagine improvements that could be made in our work environment. Maybe our school needs new buildings or refurbishment of the tired-looking staffroom filled with furniture from another century.

Dreams come true through skilful project management. Every quality school is guided by the principle of continuous improvement. Every aspect of the school is regularly examined to see what needs improvement. Projects make improvements happen.

St Stithians College in South Africa has a number of community outreach projects. One of them is their Thandulwazi teacher leadership and management programme. Teachers from disadvantaged schools are welcomed on board to learn and share from each other. Together they plan improvement projects for their own schools.

The project can be short, medium or long-term. A short-term project is one that should be able to be done in a time-frame of up to six months whereas a medium term project might need two or three years to reach completion. A long-term project could take years to complete. An example would be to fund-raise and build a school hall.

Air travel : 2022

In the Thandulwazi leadership programme, one principal's short-term project was to make her school a litter-free zone. The project involved far more than simply picking up pieces of paper and binning them. It aimed to make everyone aware of the need for a cleaner physical environment. Everyone was made to understand how they could all make contributions. In the space of a few months, the school was transformed into a more beautiful and cleaner environment for the children and staff. Gardens blossomed outside classroom doors; graffiti was nowhere to be found. A greater sense of belonging and school pride soared.

A sample of the Thandulwazi attendees' projects were:

- Change the school uniform to make it more comfortable for the children and be better value-for-money
- Start self-defence classes for girls
- Build a wall around the perimeter of the school
- Establish a vegetable garden to feed the learners
- Replace prefab classrooms with brick and mortar buildings
- Build a science lab.

Before starting a project, do a baseline assessment. A baseline assessment answers this question, “What's the situation like right now?” The baseline assessment can be done in many ways. An obvious one is to simply listen and look. What do you see that needs improvement? What suggestions do people make when chatting to you? What concerns are raised at meetings? A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the school is another effective way of identifying a much-needed project.

Whatever project is selected, there's a need for 'buy-in' from those who are going to make it happen. Yes, there are stand-alone projects done by one person on their own. However, most projects involve teams. When you can get cooperation from your team members, your project is likely to become a reality.

Like the Wright brothers, may your projects take flight and make a world of difference.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

This newsletter is published under the aegis of SAQI as a social responsibility project. You are welcome to download earlier issues at **www.saqi.co.za**
Go to '**SAQI Publications**' and then click '**Quality Education News**'. Otherwise scan the **QR-Code** to take you directly to the page. If you'd like to be put on the mailing list, contact Mrs Vanessa du Toit on **vanessa@saqi.co.za**

Questions that help plan and manage the project

Great achievements start with big dreams. Sadly, however, not all worthwhile dreams come true. Dreams need to be followed by prior planning and ongoing managing.

To help plan and manage a project, there are questions that need answering. These step-by-step questions will help you achieve project success:

Question 1 What do you want to achieve?

Describe precisely the aim of the project. A school might aim, for example, to build a classroom. What particular type of classroom do you want? How many learners are to be seated in the room? What subjects are intended to be taught in the classroom? The layout requirements of an art room could be quite different to that of a computer room.

Question 2 What's your project deadline?

If you don't set a completion date, the project becomes a 'nice-to-have' but never-realised project. A deadline helps to get everyone focussed and working on the project.

Question 3 What's your budget?

Many intended projects fail because of poor budgeting. When drawing up a budget, include all the factors such as consultation fees, incidental expenses, labour, material and staff training. Accept that at the start of the project, you'll not be able to accurately know all the expected expenses.

Rather over-budget. If you come in under budget, you and the team will look good. Now you'll have unexpected money for your next project!

Question 4 What are the different tasks?

A project involves a number of tasks that need a wide range of knowledge and skills. List all the tasks that need to be done in each step of the project. If you know people who've done the same sort of project, ask for advice. They can help you save time and money as they share their experiences. Don't reinvent the wheel!

Question 5 In what order are tasks to be done?

Make sure that there is a logical sequence of the tasks. There was the incident of a school that started a construction without getting prior municipal approval of the architect's plans. The additional and unbudgeted expenses as well as time delays could have been avoided.

Question 6 How much time is given to each task?

Decide on the time needed to do each task. Flanagan (2013:314) advises trying an optimistic time, a pessimistic time and then taking the average.

The Covid 19 pandemic impacted negatively on a number of projects that had to put on hold in 2020 and 2021. In South Africa, electricity lockdowns further stalled building projects. Accept that very few projects go precisely according to time plans.

Question 7 What's the schedule?

Now that you know the different tasks and expected time frames for each task, draw up a schedule. The schedule indicates expected completion dates.

One way to do a schedule is to do a Gantt chart. It was originally designed by Henry Gantt, an American mechanical engineer and social scientist. The chart lets you see at a glance if the different tasks to the project are on schedule.

Question 8 Who does what?

Projects require team members who have a range of skills and different areas of knowledge. Look at your team members and give them tasks that best align with their abilities and interests. If you're not sure of their preferences, ask them.

Teamwork involves getting the right people sitting on the right bus. If you feel that a person might be unsuitable for a particular project, keep that person off the bus. To those on the bus, try to get everyone sitting in their right seats on the bus. Use their particular strengths to get peak performance.

Question 9 Who does the monitoring?

The project leader or designated people, need to monitor the progress of the different tasks. Keep track of the input from team members. Communicate, communicate and communicate! By so doing, you can help make everyone feel appreciated, involved and keep motivation levels high. When hiccups happen – as is likely – deal decisively and promptly with them.

Question 10 When do we celebrate?

Few projects are smooth-sailing with no gusty winds trying to steer them off-course. Research has shown that after the initial enthusiasm for new projects, there can be a drop in positivity. Difficulties arise; date deadlines aren't met.

If you're the leader, you have to try to keep morale high. Therefore, as small steps are achieved on the way towards completing the project, celebrate. Give fulsome praise; have mini-celebration parties. Say or write the words of encouragement. Remind the team that they are on the road to achieving project success.

Gantt chart

	31 March	30 April	31 May	30 June	31 July
Task 1					
Task 2					
Task 3					
Task 4					
Task 5					

The horizontal bar indicates the task frames and the vertical bar, the time frames. Note that certain tasks in a project can start at the same time such as Tasks 1 and 3. Other tasks can only be done once other tasks have been completed. For instance, Task 4 can only begin once Tasks 1-3 have been completed.

Acknowledgement: Rossiter 2011: 75

References

Flanagan, N & Finger, J 2013. *The management bible*. Cape Town: Zebra Press.

Rossiter, T 2011. *Management basics*. Leamington Spa: Easy Steps.

Make sure the project succeeds

Not every project plan becomes a reality. They sometimes fail ... and spectacularly so. Every year car manufacturers bring out new models. A few months into their huge advertising campaigns, the manufacturers realise that sometimes the new models aren't selling. The cars are 'bombs'. Quickly the manufacturers take these financial disasters off the market. Maybe near where you live, you've noticed a restaurant that's opened with much fanfare and plenty of publicity. The restaurant has 'Opening Specials'. A few months later, it closes its doors forever.

Adhere to certain basics to avoid the likelihood of project disasters. Flanagan and Finger (2013: 316-317) advise:

*** Think ahead**

It's impossible to think of all the things that could go wrong. However, a little bit of prior thinking helps one become aware of possible hiccups. Have contingency plans in place. Have a Plan B. Imagine, for example, of a school function that's scheduled to be held outdoors. What will be done should it rain?

*** Guard against carelessness**

A project may be exciting and everyone is getting swept up in the enthusiasm. In the euphoria, mistakes are not noticed. Carelessness creeps in. Check the emails, the letters, the posters before sending them out. Check for accuracy in budgets. Get critical eyes to scrutinise them for possible errors.

*** Take a stand against incompetence and laziness**

A few months ago the Proteas lost a cricket test match against the Black Caps in New Zealand. Introspection and strong words followed. One explanation was that the Proteas dropped a number of catches during the match. A few of those dropped catches should have easily been caught at test-match level. In the next game, the Proteas' catching was much better.

As a project manager or leader, there's a need to be vigilant about performance. There's a need to continually improve performance standards.

*** Delegate carefully**

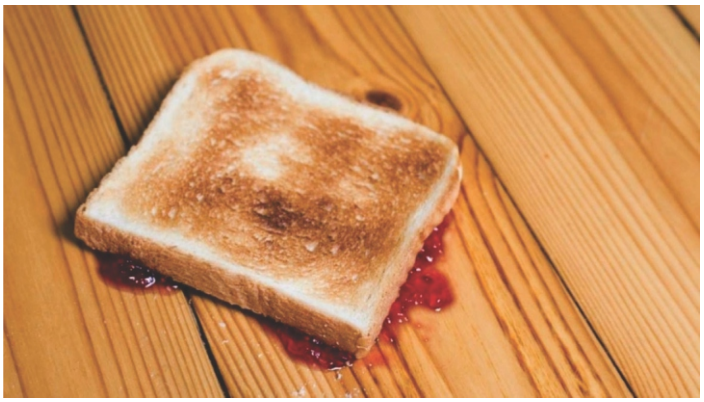
As mentioned earlier, it's important that everyone is sitting in their right seat on the project bus. People need to have tasks that best suit them. In a team, for example, there are those who are at their best when generating ideas and solving problems. Others might prefer doing the 'hard physical graft'. Put people in their preferred places in the project. While team members are working on the project, give them a sense of ownership. Hand over authority to them.

*** Supervise**

This point might seem like a contradiction of the last sentence of the above paragraph. Teams maintain their authority over their tasks. However, there's a need to follow-up on instructions given in the project process. Early identification of tasks not being done according to plan can help avoid derailments. Sound supervision helps avoid mistakes which cause extra costs and time delays.

*** Remember Murphy's Law**

When projects go awry, one can become despondent. At such times, one needs to remember Murphy's Law. Nothing – or incredibly little – goes exactly according to plan. At times like this, remember these Murphy truisms quoted by Flanagan (317):

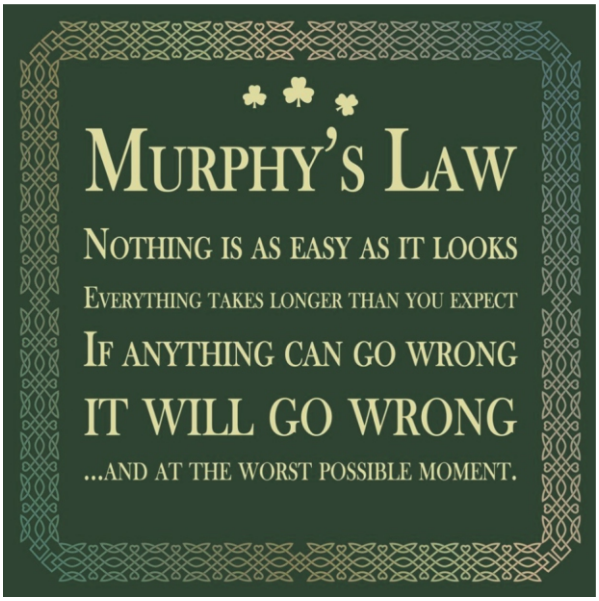


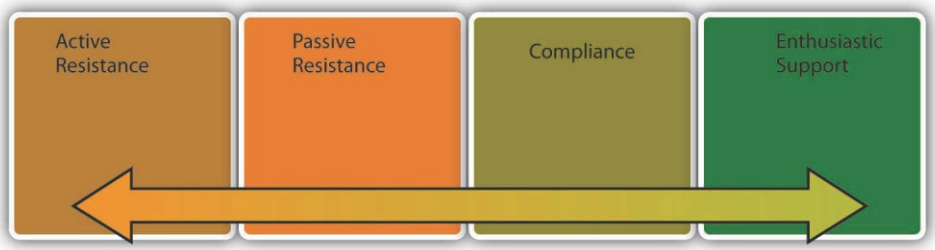
- If anything can go wrong, it will.
- Nothing is as easy as it looks at first.
- If there is a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will cause the most damage will be the one to go wrong.
- Anytime things appear to be going better, you'll most probably will have overlooked something.
- Should you do everything right, nobody will notice. Should you make a mistake, everyone will notice.
- It's impossible to make anything foolproof because fools are so ingenious.

As you deal with the challenges that confront your project, don't look for soft options. Compromising standards can be the easy way out. They could water-down an initial outstanding project. Stand by your standards. Steve Jobs – the former co-founder and CEO of Apple – gave this advice to project leaders: Be a yardstick of Quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected.

Reference

Flanagan, N & Finger, J 2013. *The management bible*. Cape Town: Zebra Press.





Why are there project resistors?

When a project starts, there are those who are excited. Then there are those who simply 'go with the flow'. They accept that change is inevitable in any school and that includes doing new projects. Yet there are also third and fourth groups – if not managed professionally – become toxic. They are the project resistors. Either actively or passively, they might try to sabotage a project.

What can be done to change the negativity of the project resistors? What can be done to make them cooperative partners?

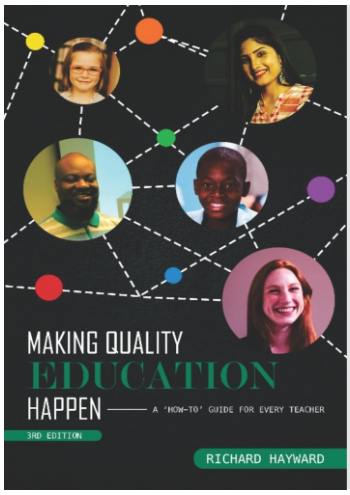
Projects often involve a change of the way things are going to be done in the future. People are going to have to do things differently; people could be moved out of their comfort zones. To get resistors on board, it's crucial to understand their concerns. There's a need to allay their fears and give them support going forward.

When computers started becoming a significant factor in classroom teaching, there were many teachers who felt uncomfortable. New skills had to be learnt. Even when computer basics had been learnt, there was the need for what seemed like never-ending upgrade training sessions. There were the fears of being unable to cope with the change from the blackboard to the smartboard and much, much more.

Project leaders need to address the fears that people might have in learning new skills. Training is essential. It has to be done at a pace that is comfortable for the trainees.

Another reason for resistance to projects is that of self-interest. The project could involve more work. The question might be asked as to whether there will be higher salaries as a result. Projects can result in changes in status of certain people in a school. For example, there could be a higher status as well as financial rewards given to the information technology specialist. Certain teachers might fear that they could become redundant.

Project leaders need to be good listeners and sensitive to the concerns of the resistors. There should be open discussions on the impact of the changes that might result from the project. Communicate in a way that's open, honest and imbued with empathy.



Every school can be a Quality school

It's a bold statement but it's a true one. In the third edition of Richard Hayward's book, **Making Quality Education happen – a 'how-to' guide for every teacher**, the author shares ways to make the seemingly impossible possible.

The book looks at a range of leadership and management practices that are used in outstanding South African and other schools across the world. These schools are places of educational excellence. A recurring theme of the book is that little money is needed to achieve much quality.

Takealot sells the book for R 200 (ZAR). Amazon has the book in kindle format for $ 8.04 and $ 16.99 for a colour paperback edition. Smashwords sells the book in e-book format for $ 6.99. Both the Amazon and Smashwords sites give you a 20% free read of the book.

"You can stay as you are for the rest of your life or you can change to ..."

SACE
South African Council for Educators
Towards Excellence in Education

SAQI (South African Quality Institute) has a range of presentations and workshops that are endorsed by SACE (South African Council for Educators). Professional Development points are earned.

Topics covered include a wide range of leadership and management issues common to schools. Examples are: bullying (amongst and between learners and staff), change management, discipline, teacher stress and Values Education. The facilitator, Dr Richard Hayward, is a former classroom teacher, senior management team member and principal of two South African public (state) schools.

If you would like details of the programmes, please contact him on **rpdhayward@yahoo.com** or 011 888 3262. The programmes are done at schools and tertiary institutions across Southern Africa. Poor schools are sponsored.