Full Length Research Paper

The importance of management training topics as rated by school managers in South Africa: Implications for training

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Training is regarded as a key HRM function necessary for achievement of organisational goals. Continuous management training is important for management renewal, and even more so in today's ever changing environment. Without it, even the most well resourced organisation may soon become like a "rudderless ship" in the waters where the tide is ever changing. The objectives of this study were four fold. To: (i) determine the importance that school managers in two South African education districts attach to selected in-service school management training topics; (ii) determine the relative importance of topics for each management level; (iii) make generalisations concerning school managers' training needs for the whole of South Africa; (iv) make generalisations concerning selection of training topics for management training in general. An extensive review of related literature preceded the empirical study. Thereafter, stratified random sampling was used to select 88 participants. 69 completed questionnaires were returned yielding 78.4% response rate. The results show that respondents regard all the training topics as important and ratings of the importance of topics differ significantly based on: level of education; experience; school type; and management level. Implications of the findings discussed and suggestions for further research are provided.

Key words: Management training, in-service training, school managers, training, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Actions taken to address equity in the workplace in South Africa since democratisation in 1994 have led to increased opportunities for previously marginalised groups and individuals to assume school management positions. Unfortunately most of these new set of school managers are unprepared or at best under prepared for their roles because they do not possess prior or appropriate managerial training (More, 2004). But managing schools may not be challenging for only newly appointed school managers. With so many new laws and policies introduced since 1994, even the most experienced school manager will encounter difficulties in dealing with laws that are significantly different from what they were

accustomed to in the past.

The logical solution has been for school managers irrespective of experience to undergo regular in-service school management training with the hope of developing and/or improving their managerial effectiveness. The effectiveness of these training efforts is however seriously in doubt as cases upon cases of maladminis-tration are reported daily in the South African press. Honestly, as observed by More (2004), in-service school management training programs seem to be failing to achieve the required impact on the managerial effectiveness of South African school managers. There can be several reasons for this situation.

Reasons for training failures

Early attempts by Carlson (1981), Dickson (1983),

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Kiesner (1984) and Reid (1987) identified two main causes of management training programme failures namely: (i) training course contents that are not reflective of the real problems of trainees, and (ii) course contents that do not reflect the priorities trainees. In a related study, Adams (1998) came to almost the same conclusions in pointing out that management training courses fail because they: (i) are too generalised; (ii) fail to meet the specific needs of trainees; and (iii) fail to take into personal characteristics such as age, educational background, previous work experience and willingness to participate in training.

Importance of including views of trainees

It is important to take trainees' views into consideration when designing course contents (Analoui, 1997, Malone et al., 2000; McClelland et al., 1993; Peel, 1993). Malone et al. (2000) also makes the important point that in-service training activities must be based on a careful assessment of the actual and perceived needs of the participants. Analoui (1997) points out that considering the perceptions, personal interests, objectives and preferences of trainees' could result in greater realisation of training objectives. He believes that doing so leads to better understanding of what their jobs are about and how they can be carried out more effectively. Analoui (1997) concludes by calling for trainees to be seen as people who are capable of making choices. Following on all these normative assertions, it becomes obvious that considering the perceptions and preferences of individual school managers when making decisions concerning their training, that is, allowing school managers to indicate their preferences for training topics could add value to training provided to them. In short, school managers must be the central figures in any decision concerning their in-service training.

It is true that organisations have goals to be achieved but it must also be understood that organisations are primarily made up of individuals with own goals, expectations, likes, and dislikes (McClelland et al., 1993) which might be in conflict with organisational goals. This means that departmental training goals might be in conflict with school managers' personal developmental goals hence preferred training needs. In order to achieve a balance, it would be important to take the training needs of school managers into consideration during the planning stage. In fact, Peel (1993) cautions against organizations just "picking" training courses from available lists because such practices often do not lead to attainment of intended training goals. It is therefore essential to select training topics in conjunction with the school managers.

Examination of Graham and Mihal's (1996) views on the subject is also critical to understanding how managers' training needs should be determined.

According to Van Dyk (2003), Graham and Mihal (1996) believe that managers should be involved in evaluating their own needs because they are in a better position to identify the content of their work. The model makes the point that managers need to be involved in identifying areas in which they have to improve. Specifically, managers must rank the importance of their training needs. In this way, topics that are relevant to their training needs will be guaranteed inclusion. It must be pointed out that the model allows for the immediate seniors to evaluate identified training needs to ensure that organisational needs are also included thereby ensuring balance between organisational and individual needs. Thus, seeking and utilising school managers' views regarding the contents of their in-service management training could lead to the inclusion of the most appropriate contents so that their shortcomings can be addressed. This involvement is also likely to generate a sense of involvement hence buy in into the resultant training programme.

In South Africa, there has been limited research concerning the identification of topics that school managers perceive as important for their own training. It fact, it appears as if South African school managers are not involved in the design of their in-service management training programmes because the literature search reveals that to date, no empirical research exists on the subject in this regard. This absence of involvement creates a situation whereby school managers might not regard the contents of the training programmes as being important to their training needs. Consequently, school managers may not take such training programmes seriously.

Problem statement

The problem is that excluding school managers from the selection of in-service training topics has the potential of making the resultant training programmes inappropriate and ineffective because selected topics might not address their specific needs. This is precisely because the training needs of the various groups of trainees might differ. Therefore, training topics that do not take these differing circumstances into consideration might be inappropriate and ineffective. School managers, training needs might differ because school principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments (HODs) perform different roles, have different qualifications, manage different types of schools, and possess different levels of experience. What might appear important to the HOD might not be so for the principal and deputy principal and the reverse could also be true.

In addition, school managers as a whole might regard the contents of the training programmes unimportant for their training needs and consequently might not take the resultant training courses seriously. It is therefore, important to involve all categories of school management in the in the selection of training topics. One way of doing this is to allow them to rank the importance of possible topics
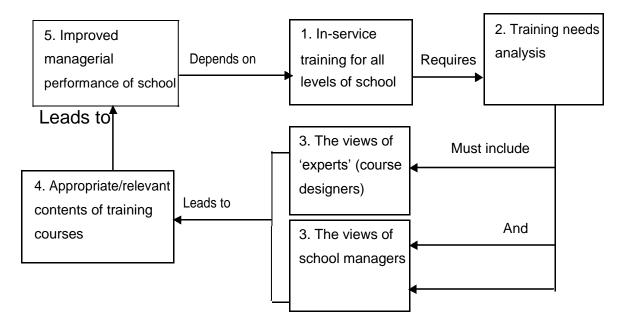
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┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐
│ 5. Improved     │              │ 1. In-service   │              │ 2. Training needs│
│ managerial      │  Depends on  │ training for all│   Requires   │ analysis        │
│ performance of  │─────────────▶│ levels of school│─────────────▶│                 │
│ school          │              │                 │              │                 │
└─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘
   ▲
   │ Leads to
   │                                  ┌─────────────────┐
┌─────────────────┐                   │ 3. The views of │   Must include
│ 4. Appropriate/ │                   │ 'experts' (course│◀────────────────
│ relevant        │     Leads to      │ designers)      │
│ contents of     │◀──────────────────│                 │
│ training courses│                   │ 3. The views of │      And
│                 │                   │ school managers │◀────────────────
└─────────────────┘                   │                 │◀────────────────
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Figure 1. School managers' role in the selection of topics for in-service management training.

according to their training needs. In this way, important topics can be included while the unimportant ones can be excluded.

Objectives of the study

As mentioned earlier, the objectives of the study were four fold namely to: (i) determine the importance that school managers in two South African education districts attach to selected in-service school management training topics; (ii) determine the relative importance of topics for each management level; (iii) make generalisations about school managers' training needs for the whole of South Africa; (iv) make generalisations for management training in general.

Based on these objectives, four specific research questions were posed: (i) What importance do the school managers surveyed attach to selected topics for possible inclusion in in-service training program aimed at improving their managerial effectiveness?; (ii) are there differences in the school managers rating of the importance of topics based on management level?; (iii) what generalisations can be made from the sample data concerning school management training in South Africa?; and (iv) What generalisations can be made concerning management training in general?

The conceptual framework

The central argument for this paper (Figure 1) is that: poor or ineffective management of schools can be traced to ineffective training courses. We argue that current

training courses are ineffective precisely because of inappropriate course contents which can be traced to the exclusion of the views of school managers during the selection of course contents for their in-service training. Therefore, for improvement of managerial effectiveness to take place in schools, managers' views should be taken into consideration when course contents are being selected. The expectation is that the resultant training, based on the selected course contents, will meet the needs and expectations of both the NDoE as well as individual managers which will result in the improvement of the managerial performance of school managers.

What roles do school managers in South Africa play today?

Answering this question requires one to first examine school management organogram. A typical school management organogram places the school principal sometimes referred to as Head Master/Mistress at the top of the school management hierarchy. Depending on the number of students, a school may have one or two deputy principals who rank second to the principal in terms of authority. Immediately below the deputy principal(s) and completing the school management hierarchy is the heads of departments (HODs). The number of HODs is determined by the number of learners in a school. Thus, the ideal situation is for a school to have one principal, one deputy principal, and a number of HODs (depending upon the size of the school).

Coming back to the roles and responsibilities of school managers, the national department of education

personnel administrative measures (PAM) (DoE, 1999), spells out the following responsibilities and roles for school managers. As the overall head, the school principal must ensure: (i) proper keeping of school accounts and records and their best use thereof – a financial management task; (ii) proper maintenance of school journal (containing records of all important events connected with the school) – a general management task;

(iii) that departmental circulars and any other information the school receives are brought to the notice of all affected role players as soon as possible and that they are stored in an accessible manner – a general management task (DoE, 1999). In addition, the school principal is actively involved in the recruitment of new staff to the school – a human resource management task. Essentially therefore, school principals perform the three management roles of human resource management, general management, and financial management as discussed by Lussier (2006).

The deputy principals on their part assist principals in the overall management of the schools and in the absence of the principals must assume overall management of the schools (DoE, 1999). This means that in most cases, the role played by the deputy principal is similar to that of the principal. That is, the deputy principal also performs the three management roles of human resource management, general management, and financial management. The HODs' main responsibilities are to: (i) control and direct activities of educators in their department; (ii) control and manage school stock, textbooks, and equipment of their departments; and (iii) perform administrative duties such as being secretary to general staff meetings**,** timetabling, budgeting, and fee collection (DoE, 1999). While budgeting and fee collection implies that HODs perform planning and financial roles, these functions are minimal. From the above, it seems that the work of HODs is essentially controlling and organising in nature which are part of general management. Therefore, the HOD's main task seems to be general management with some elements of financial management and human resource management as well.

From the foregoing discussion, we come to the conclusion that all school managers to some extent perform the three management roles of human resource management, general management, and financial management but the degree to which they perform these roles differ hence preference for training topics may differ depending on the level of management occupied. It must however be pointed out that all these functions must be performed under strict compliance with the law. This makes adequate knowledge of the legal framework of school management extremely important. Besides, human resource management in South Africa is heavily regulated by legislation that school managers must also be aware of. The implication of all this is that training topics for school management need to cover human resource management, general management, financial management, as well as legislation.

The legal context of school management in post-apartheid South Africa

A significant number of legislation and policies exist for regulating the execution of school managers' responsibilities and roles in post-apartheid South Africa but we discuss the most important. As pointed out by Oosthuizen et al. (2003:20), legislation is the principal source of the policies guiding education and education management. The Constitution of South Africa 1996a (Act 108 of 1996) is the overriding law of the country, as every other law derives from it. The Constitution and various acts of parliament prescribe standards of behaviour for all citizenry and also have direct impact on the way schools are managed. But laws, Acts and Constitutions evolve over time and must be constantly reviewed and updated to keep abreast with the times. Apart from the Constitution, there are several acts of parliament and codes of good practice that provide the legal framework for the conduct and management of organisations in South Africa. Even if school managers' formal training has included educational law, the fact that these laws change over time due to reviews to take into account the demands of the times means that school managers need to undergo regular refresher courses in the various aspects of the law that have bearing on how they manage their schools. Table 1 depicts what we consider the "must know" legal areas for school managers in the current South African landscape and their implications for school management.

Proposed in-service management training topics for school managers

Based on the discussion so far, our selections of training topics (Table 2) cover four management categories: human resource management; financial management; general management; and legislation. Human resource management involves planning for attracting, training, and developing employees (Lussier, 2006). A review of the human resource management literature that includes the works of Mondy and Noe (2005), Noe (2003), Wexley and Latham (2002), Steyn and Niekerk (2002), and Swanepoel and Erasmus (2000) reveal the following key human resource management activities: Job analysis (design and specification); Recruitment; selection and induction; Performance management; Training and development; Health and safety; Labour relations; Grievance procedures; Human resource information systems; and Communication. At some stage in school management, monies are collected and these must be managed and accounted for in a proper way. Financial management in schools requires knowledge of basic bookkeeping, as. well as the ability to compile and interpret basic financial documents such as income statements, balance sheets and cash flow statements.

In addition, the school principal and deputy principal

Table 1. Legislation and their implications for school management.

Legislation	Implication to school management
Constitution of South Africa 1996a (Act 108 of 1996)	The Constitution provides for the protection of an individual's fundamental rights (Oosthuizen et al., 2003:21).
South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act 84 of 1996)	The SASA determines a nationally uniform, non-discriminatory system for the organisation, management and financing of schools (Oosthuizen et al., 2003:28).
Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) (Act 85 of 1993)	OHSA provides for the personal safety of employees and others. School managers should appoint a safety representative and safety committee (Oosthuizen et al., 2003:32).
Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (Act 1 of 1999)	Sections 40(1) (b) and 55(1) (b) of the PFMA stipulates that accounting officers, in this case school managers, must prepare financial statements for each financial year, in accordance with recognised accounting practices.
Labour Relations Act (LRA) (Act 66 of 1995) as amended in 2002	LRA provides for the advancement of economic development, social justice, labour peace, and the democratisation of the workplace (school).
Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) (Act 75 of 1997) as amended in 2002	BCEA regulates employer/employee relationships by prescribing minimum standards below which the employer and employee may not go (Grobler et al., 2006:85).
Employment Equity Act (EEA) (Act 55 of 1998)	EEA provides for employment equity, as well as matters incidental thereto. The school manager needs to promote the constitutional right to equity by eliminating unfair discrimination in the workplace.
Skills Development Act (SDA) (Act 97 of 1998)	The aim of this Act is to improve employees' competencies, develop tailor-made training programmes that meet organizational needs, and ensure quality training at the workplace (Grobler et al., 2006:337). This act provides for training programmes that will enhance school managers' performance.
Employment of Educators Act (Act 76 of 1998)	This Act provides for the service conditions of educators, as well as regulations in respect of appointment, promotion and transfer (Oosthuizen et al., 2003:28). This implies that the school manager should be aware of this Act, as he/she recruits new members and promotes or transfers employees.
Code of Good Practice on Key Aspects of HIV/Aids and Employment	Issued in terms of Section 203(1) of the Labour Relations Act in December 2001 (Clarke, 2007:149). School managers need to be vigilant about the aspects of HIV/AIDS in their respective schools.

must in their financial management role budget for income and expenditure and cash flows for the academic year. Funds must also be raised to complement what they receive from government. Thus, the essential financial management knowledge areas for school managers seem to be: basic bookkeeping; compiling cash flow statements; compiling and interpreting income statements, cash flow statements and balance sheets, fundraising and budgeting. Regarding General management, various sources including the works of Jones et al. (2000), and Fayol (1949) were used to identify typical management tasks that school managers also engage in.

These include leading, decision making, directing, controlling, motivating, planning, delegating, project management, strategic management, and information management. Finally, legislations that impact on school management in South Africa were identified and discussed. Together with the constitution, some Acts of parliament and policies of the national department of education that regulates how schools should be managed in South Africa were identified. Table 2 represents the proposed in-service training topics that were obtained from the synthesis of the literature. These topics form the basis of the questionnaire for the empirical study.

Table 2. Proposed in-service training topics for school managers.

Knowledge areas	Topics
Human resource management	Job analysis (design and specification); Recruitment, selection, and induction; Performance management; Training and development; Health and safety; Managing diversity; Grievance procedure; Human resource information systems; Communication
Financial management	Basic bookkeeping; Compiling income statements; Compiling income balance sheets; Compiling income cash flow statements; Interpreting income statements; Interpreting income balance sheets; Interpreting cash flow statements; Fundraising; Budgeting
General management	Leading; Decision making; Directing; Controlling; Motivating; Planning; Delegating; Project management; Strategic management; Information management
Legislation	Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996); South African Schools Act (Act 86 of 1996); Labour Relations Act (Act 66 of 1995), as amended in 2002; Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Act 75 of 1997), as amended in 2002; Employment; Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998); Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998); Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act 85 of 1993); Code of Good Practice on Key Aspects of HIV/Aids and Employment; Employment of Educators Act (Act 76 of 1998); Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (Act 1 of 1999)

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative techniques were used in the collection and analysis of sample data to draw conclusions and make generalisations about school managers' training needs. The population for the study consisted of all school managers serving in public primary, middle or secondary and high schools in the Greater Taung and Taledi APOs of the North West Province department of education. The units of analysis consisted of the individual school managers classified as Headmasters, Deputy Headmasters, and HODs in the schools. The sample frame was the list of all schools in the Taledi and Greater Taung APOs. A list of schools was available from the two APOs. There are 176 schools in the two APOs with Greater Taung having a relatively higher number of schools (114 or 65%) compared to Taledi APO with (62 or 35%) schools. The population of schools according to the type of school is as follows. Combined schools (7 or 4%); high schools (69 or 39%); middle schools (42 or 24%); and primary schools (58 or 33%).

These percentages were used to calculate the proportions of sample elements for each APO and types of schools. Representative (proportionate) samples of schools in the APOs were drawn using stratified sampling. All managers in the selected schools formed the sample elements/units. Stratified random sampling is a form of probability sampling that involves the selection of random samples proportionate to the size of the sampling unit (Davis, 2005). Stratified random sampling *inter alia* reduces the chance of failing to include members of the population (Davis, 2005). Through stratification, the inclusion of reasonable numbers of each type of school was ensured. In all, a sample of 88 school managers was selected from the population of school managers in the two APOs (Greater Taung and Taledi). Based on the above percentages 57 school managers were selected from the Greater Taung APO and the remaining 31 from the Taledi APO. Using the same procedure, the 88 school managers consisted of 29 primary schools managers; 21 middle or secondary school managers; 34 high school managers; and 4 combined school managers.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect mainly quantitative data, which was statistically analysed in order to answer the research questions. 69 completed questionnaires were returned yielding 78.4% response rate. A structured five-point rating-scale (Likert-scale) questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. An initial questionnaire was pre-tested on ten school managers who were not included in the final sample. Errors detected and problematic questions were rectified leading to a refined 56-item questionnaire (Table 3). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section required participants to provide certain demographic data, while the second section required them to rate topics that were categorised into four management areas: Human Resource Management; General Management; Financial Management; and the Legislation. Respondents had to rate topics according to their importance to their individual management training needs. The scale ranged between 1-completely unimportant; 2-unimportant; 3-don't know; 4-important; and 5-extremely important. Space was provided for additional topics to be included where respondents felt it was necessary.

Associated with every self-constructed measurement instrument is the perennial question of soundness, goodness, or credibility. Cooper and Schindler (2003), agree that validity and reliability are the two main criteria for determining the soundness of an instrument. An instrument can be said to be valid when the measure accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure - meaning it adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept (Babbie, 2005). In simple terms it means the extent to which a measuring instrument measures what it is actually intended to measure.

Although there are several ways of assuring validity in research, criterion, construct, or content validity remains the most popular. In the present study, attempts were made to ensure content validity. Content validity also known as face validity indicates the extent to which the contents of the instrument adequately cover the entire spectrum of the concept being measured. While Cooper and Schindler (2003) believe that an instrument that contains sufficient representative elements of the concept is a valid instrument, Gay and Airasian (2003) believe content validity can be assured through expert opinion. Through the extensive literature and subjecting the questionnaire to peer (expert) scrutiny, both conditions were met. The other condition for instrument credibility that is reliability, means the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions (Bell, 2005).

According to Zikmund (2003) an instrument is deemed reliable if it is free from error and hence, produces consistent results.

Table 3. Demographic data of participants

Distribution of participants according to type of school					
	Primary	Middle	Combined	High	Total
Frequency	21	16	2	30	69
%	30.4	23.2	2.9	43.5	100

Distribution of participants according to APO			
	Taung	Taledi	Total
Frequency	43	26	69
%	62.3	37.67	100

Distribution of participants according to school population					
	600 or more	500-599	400-499	300-399	299 and below	Total
Frequency	16	16	16	12	9	69
%	23.19	23.19	23.19	17.39	13.04	100

Distribution of participants according to management level			
	Principal	D. principal	HOD	Total
Frequency	9	17	43	69
%	13	24.6	62.3	100

Distribution of participants according to gender			
	Male	Female	Total
Frequency	43	26	69
%	62.32	37.68	100

Distribution of participants according to highest qualification					
	Doctorate	Masters	Honours	Bachelor	Dip. or lower	Total
Frequency	0	8	29	14	18	69
%	0	11.59	42.03	20.29	26.09	100

Distribution of participants according to formal management training			
	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	40	29	69
%	57.97	42.03	100

Distribution of participants according to teaching experience				
	Over 10 years	6-10 years	3-5 years	Below 3 years	Total
Frequency	63	3	3	0	69
%	91	4.50	4.50	0	100

Distribution of participants according to management experience				
	Over 10 years	6-10 years	3-5 years	Below 3 years	Total
Frequency	26	25	10	8	69
%	37.68	36.23	14.49	11.59	100

Distribution of participants according to managerial training workshop attendance			
	Yes	No	Total
Frequency	56	13	69
%	81.16	18.84	100

Saunders et al. (2000) identify four main sources of error that pose a threat to instrument reliability. These are subject error; subject bias; observer error; and observer bias. Dzansi (2004) observes that whilst it is impossible to achieve 100% reliability, steps can be taken to minimise errors and biases that pose a threat to reliability. Subject bias or error occurs when the interviewee deliberately

provides inaccurate responses or refuses to answer certain questions because the questions are intrusive, or when the response rate is low (Dzansi, 2006). In order to avoid this problem, care was taken to avoid intrusive questions whilst hand-delivering the questionnaire and being present when the questionnaire was completed reduced the incidence of low response rate.

On the other hand, observer errors and biases may come from the interviewer(s). For example, different approaches by different interviewers can lead to observer-related problems. In the current study, two interviewers were used, which created the potential for the occurrence of interviewer errors and biases.

This problem was minimised by the use of a structured question-naire that did not allow for personal interpretation. In terms of procedure, the questionnaires were taken to schools and personally handed over to participants in the identified schools. Permission was sought and obtained from the relevant education authorities to conduct the research. Prior to the distribution, participants were provided with full information regarding the research. Respondents were also told of their right not to participate. They were also assured of confidentiality of information obtained.

Data was analysed using statistical package statistica version 8. In the first stage, means - Average Weighted Response (AWR (Adams, 1998)), standard deviations, frequency tables, and rank orders and other descriptive statistics were produced and used to display the data. The frequency table, rank order, and AWR, were used to describe the importance that school managers' attach to their in-service training hence answer research question 1. In order to rank the relative importance of topics, percentage analysis, as well as the AWR was used. The AWR is given by the formula:

AWR =$\sum fx/n$.

Where f is the number of respondents (frequency), x is the numerical rating ranging from 1 to 5 assigned to the topic by each respondent, and n is the sample size.

RESULTS

The demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the 69 respondents include gender, highest level of education, teaching experience, management experience and position, type of school, school population (size), schools' APO, atten-dance of formal training, and attendance of management training workshops. Table 3 shows the various demogra-phic distributions of the data collected. The data in Table 3 shows that: managers of high schools formed the lar-gest group with (43.5%) respondents, followed by primary schools with (30.4%), middle schools with (23.2%), and combined schools (also known as comprehensive schools) with (2.9%) respondents.

Rating of the importance of topics

The respondents' perception of the importance of various topics as skills and knowledge necessary for improving their managerial performance is reported in Tables 4 to 8. As indicated earlier, topics were rated according to a five-point scale: 1 = completely unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = don't know, 4 = important and 5 = extremely impor-tant. As stated earlier, an average weighted response

(AWR) – indicating the importance of a topic – was calculated using the formula:

$$AWR = \sum fx/N$$

Where f is the number of respondents (frequency), x is the numerical rating ranging from 1 to 5 assigned to the topic by each respondent, and n is the sample size. This means that the lowest possible AWR is 1 (completely unimportant), while the highest possible AWR is 5 (extremely important). For the purpose of this study, any topic or category with a ranking of 4 or more is considered important. The first column of Table 4 reflects the question numbers as they appear in the questionnaire (Appendix A), while the second column reflects selected training topics. The third column depicts the four manage-ment training topic categories. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of topics, divided into four managerial areas or categories (Human Resource Management - HRM, General Management - GM, Financial Management - FM and Legislation - LG) according to their personal training needs. The section on ratings reflects how each of them was ranked. The fifth column shows the Average Weighted Response (AWR), while the last column reflects the respondents' rankings of each topic. Table 4 shows a composite rank order of the topics, revealing that the respondents regarded deci-sion making (1), planning (2), communicating, motivating, and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Act 75 of 1997) (3) as the five most important training topics in order of importance. It was noted that three topics are from general management and one each from human resources management and legislation, whilst no financial management topic is included. Eight out of the ten least important topics are from financial management. In all, the figures depicted in Table 4 suggest that to a large extent, relatively speaking, school managers regard financial management topics to be of lesser importance than the other topical areas. Table 4 shows that all AWRs are ranked important (rating 4) to extremely important (rating 5) with the overall AWR being 4.45. These rankings give an indication that the school managers regard the topics as important. In order to confirm this, further analysis was performed and the results are shown in Table 5.

The analysis consisted of testing the mean AWR of 4.45 against the median value 3. The hypothesised mean of three (3) was chosen because on the rating scale, three (3) is the median value. While a rating of one (1) or two (2) indicates completely unimportant and unimpor-tant, a rating of four (4) as well as five (5) indicates important and extremely important. A ranking of three (3) however is neutral. A conservative decision was therefore made to regard three (3) as the threshold value. Hotelling T^2 test (a kind of T-test) was performed on the means to determine whether the sample mean is significantly different from (greater than) the reference (median/mean) value three (3). Table 5 shows the results of the T-test

Table 4. School managers' perception of the importance of training topics

No	Training topic		Ratings										AWR	
			1 Completely (unimportant)		2 Unimportant		3 Don't (know)		4 Important		5 Extremely (important)			
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
34	Decision making	GM	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4	22	31.9	46	66.7	4.65	1
38	Planning	GM	0	0.0	1	1.4	0	0.0	22	31.9	46	66.7	4.64	2
23	Communicating	HR	0	0.0	2	2.9	0	0.0	23	33.3	44	63.8	4.58	3
37	Motivating	GM	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	29	42.0	40	58.0	4.58	3
46	Basic Conditions of Employment Act	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4	27	39.1	41	59.4	4.58	3
43	Constitution of South Africa	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	30	43.5	39	56.5	4.57	6
44	South African Schools Act	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	30	43.5	39	56.5	4.57	6
32	Budgeting	FM	1	1.4	1	1.4	1	1.4	22	31.9	44	63.8	4.55	8
45	Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	31	44.9	38	55.1	4.55	8
36	Controlling	GM	0	0.0	2	2.9	1	1.4	24	34.8	42	60.9	4.54	10
17	Performance management	HR	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	33	47.8	36	52.2	4.52	11
20	Managing diversity	HR	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4	31	44.9	37	53.6	4.52	11
35	Directing	GM	0	0.0	1	1.4	3	4.3	24	34.8	41	59.4	4.52	11
18	Training & development	HR	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4	32	46.4	36	52.2	4.51	14
21	Grievance procedures	HR	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	34	49.3	35	50.7	4.51	15
41	Strategic management	GM	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	5.8	26	37.7	39	56.5	4.51	15
33	Leading	GM	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4	33	47.8	35	50.7	4.49	17
42	Information management	GM	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	4.3	30	43.5	36	52.2	4.48	18
50	Public Finance Management Act 1 of 1999	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	32	46.4	36	52.2	4.46	19
47	Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4	36	52.2	32	46.4	4.45	20
16	Job analysis	HR	0	0.0	1	1.4	2	2.9	32	46.4	34	49.3	4.43	21
22	HR information systems	HR	0	0.0	1	1.4	2	2.9	35	50.7	31	44.9	4.39	22
48	Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998)	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	4.3	36	52.2	30	43.5	4.39	22
51	National Code on HIV/Aids	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	5.8	34	49.3	31	44.9	4.39	22
19	Occupational Health & safety Act	HR	0	0.0	2	2.9	3	4.3	31	44.9	33	47.8	4.38	25
40	Project management	GM	0	0.0	2	2.9	4	5.8	29	42.0	34	49.3	4.38	25
39	Delegating	GM	0	0.0	2	2.9	1	1.4	36	52.2	30	43.5	4.36	27
49	Occupational Health and Safety Act	LG	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	7.2	34	49.3	30	43.5	4.36	27
24	Basic bookkeeping	FM	0	0.0	1	1.4	5	7.2	32	46.4	31	44.9	4.35	29
29	Interpreting balance sheets	FM	0	0.0	1	1.4	6	8.7	30	43.5	32	46.4	4.35	29
28	Interpreting income statements	FM	1	1.4	1	1.4	2	2.9	35	50.7	30	43.5	4.33	31
26	Compiling balance sheets	FM	1	1.4	0	0.0	7	10.1	29	42.0	32	46.4	4.32	32
27	Compiling cash flow statements	FM	1	1.4	0	0.0	7	10.1	29	42.0	32	46.4	4.32	32
30	Interpreting cash flow statements	FM	1	1.4	0	0.0	5	7.2	33	47.8	30	43.5	4.32	32
15	Recruitment and selection	HR	1	1.4	0	0.0	3	4.3	40	58.0	25	36.2	4.28	35
25	Compiling income statements	FM	2	2.9	0	0.0	6	8.7	30	43.5	31	44.9	4.28	35
31	Fundraising	FM	1	1.4	0	0.0	4	5.8	44	63.8	20	29.0	4.19	37
	"Average" AWR												4.45	

which produced a p<0.0001. The small p value shows that the average AWR = 4.45 is statistically significantly different from (greater than) the reference (median/mean) value three (3) at all the three significance levels 0.01, 0.05, and 0.10.

The individual means were also tested against the reference value 3. The results are shown in Table 6.

Once more the results indicate that all the means are significantly different from (higher than) the reference value (3), (Table 6 column 3) at all the three significant levels 0.01, 0.05, and 0.10. These figures confirm that indeed school managers regard the topics as important. Cross-tabulations were done to investigate the ratings further. The results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 5. T-test to test significance of differences between the means.

Sample Size	37
Sample Mean	4.4499
Sample Std Dev	0.1139
Hypothesized Mean	3
Alternative Hypothesis	> 3
Standard Error of Mean	0.018729
Degrees of Freedom	36
t-Test Statistic	77.4131
p-Value	< 0.0001
Null Hypothesis. at 10% Significance	Reject
Null Hypothesis. at 5% Significance	Reject
Null Hypothesis. at 1% Significance	Reject

Table 7 shows that overall, the Principals' rating of the importance of topics (with a mean AWR = 4.50) is the highest followed by that of HODs (with a mean AWR =4.44), and Deputy Principals (with a mean AWR = 4.40). Tables 7 and 8 also show some interesting discernible patterns in the ranking of the importance of management-training topic categories. Table 7 reveals that although they do not assign the same rankings, Principals and Deputy Principals ratings of the importance of manage-ment training topics follow more or less the same order. Table 8 illustrates the rating of the importance more clearly. Both tables show that both Principals and Deputy Principals assessment of the relative importance of topic categories is the same and differs from that of the HODs. However, as revealed in Tables 7 and 8, all management levels regard financial management topics as the least important relative to the other topic categories. Table 7 also reveals that relatively speaking, the topic category GM (with a mean AWR = 4.52) appears to be the most important and followed by LG category (with a mean AWR = 4.48), followed by HRM (with a mean AWR = 4.46) and finally FM (with mean AWR = 4.33). Attention is drawn to the fact that the mean AWRs for the various topic categories HRM, FM, GM, and LG were calculated based on responses to questions 15 up to 51.

Besides the composite ratings, the topics within each of the four topic categories, Human Resource Management (HRM), Financial Management (FM), General Manage-ment (GM), and Legislation (LG), were also ranked according to their importance. These averages are then compared to the overall average in Table 4. The results are further demarcated in Tables 9, 10, 11 and 12.

Human resource management training needs

Table 9 shows that the managers rated Human Resource Management topics as skills and knowledge necessary for improving their managerial performance as the average rating for the HRM category of 4.46 is greater than the median rating score 3. It also compares better than the overall (Average) rating of 4.45 (Table 4). The majority (five out of nine) topics were rated higher than the "Average" AWR 4.5 (Table 4). Of the nine topics in the HRM category, communication (AWR = 4.58) was rated most important and recruitment and selection (AWR = 4.28) least important.

Financial management training needs

The data in Table 10 shows that respondents rated financial management training topics as necessary for improving their managerial performance. This is because all the topics were assigned ratings higher than the median value 3 and the group average of 4.33 is also higher than the median value 3. However, only one (out of nine) topic – budgeting fared better when compared to the "Average" AWR 4.5. Of the nine topics, budgeting (AWR = 4.55) emerged as the most important topic and the only one rated higher than the "Average" AWR 4.5. Fundraising (AWR = 4.19) was rated the least important topic.

General management training needs

Analysis of general management topics shows that the respondents rated general management topics as important skills and knowledge necessary for improving their managerial performance. Table 11 shows decision making (AWR = 4.65) to be the most important topic and delegating (AWR = 4.36) to be the least important topic. The group average AWR of 4.52 is higher than the "Average" AWR of 4.45 and of the ten topics, only two was rated below the "Average" of AWR 4.45. This category mean was the highest of the four topic categories.

Legislation training needs

As can be seen from Table 12, the respondents rated

Table 6. Test of means against reference constant 3.

Questions		Mean	Std. D	N	Std. err.	Reference	t-value	df	p
15	Recruitment and selection	4.28	0.68	69	0.08	3	15.50	68	0.0000
16	Job analysis	4.43	0.63	69	0.08	3	18.93	68	0.0000
17	Performance management	4.52	0.50	69	0.06	3	25.12	68	0.0000
18	Training and development	4.51	0.53	69	0.06	3	23.53	68	0.0000
19	Health and safety	4.38	0.71	69	0.09	3	16.13	68	0.0000
20	Managing diversity	4.52	0.53	69	0.06	3	23.78	68	0.0000
21	Grievance procedures	4.51	0.50	69	0.06	3	24.86	68	0.0000
22	HR information systems	4.39	0.62	69	0.08	3	18.54	68	0.0000
23	Communicating	4.58	0.65	69	0.08	3	20.16	68	0.0000
24	Basic bookkeeping	4.35	0.68	69	0.08	3	16.41	68	0.0000
25	Compiling income statements	4.28	0.86	69	0.10	3	12.38	68	0.0000
26	Compiling balance sheets	4.32	0.78	69	0.09	3	14.11	68	0.0000
27	Compiling cash flow statements	4.32	0.78	69	0.09	3	14.11	68	0.0000
28	Interpreting income statements	4.33	0.74	69	0.09	3	14.95	68	0.0000
29	Interpreting balance sheets	4.35	0.70	69	0.08	3	15.91	68	0.0000
30	Interpreting cash flow statements	4.32	0.74	69	0.09	3	14.85	68	0.0000
31	Fundraising	4.19	0.67	69	0.08	3	14.73	68	0.0000
32	Budgeting	4.55	0.74	69	0.09	3	17.45	68	0.0000
33	Leading	4.49	0.53	69	0.06	3	23.31	68	0.0000
34	Decision making	4.65	0.51	69	0.06	3	26.94	68	0.0000
35	Directing	4.52	0.66	69	0.08	3	19.28	68	0.0000
36	Controlling	4.54	0.68	69	0.08	3	18.85	68	0.0000
37	Motivating	4.58	0.50	69	0.06	3	26.39	68	0.0000
38	Planning	4.64	0.57	69	0.07	3	23.95	68	0.0000
39	Delegating	4.36	0.66	69	0.08	3	17.05	68	0.0000
40	Project management	4.38	0.73	69	0.09	3	15.67	68	0.0000
41	Strategic management	4.51	0.61	69	0.07	3	20.55	68	0.0000
42	Information management	4.48	0.58	69	0.07	3	21.01	68	0.0000
43	Constitution of South Africa	4.57	0.50	69	0.06	3	26.04	68	0.0000
44	South African Schools Act	4.57	0.50	69	0.06	3	26.04	68	0.0000
45	Labour Relations Act	4.55	0.50	69	0.06	3	25.71	68	0.0000
46	Basic Conditions of Employment Act	4.58	0.53	69	0.06	3	24.95	68	0.0000
47	Employment Equity Act	4.45	0.53	69	0.06	3	22.73	68	0.0000
48	Skills Development Act	4.39	0.57	69	0.07	3	20.12	68	0.0000
49	Occupational Health and Safety Act	4.36	0.62	69	0.07	3	18.32	68	0.0000
50	Public Finance Management Act	4.52	0.50	69	0.06	3	25.12	68	0.0000
51	National Code on HIV/Aids	4.39	0.60	69	0.07	3	19.28	68	0.0000

legislation topics as important for improving their managerial performance. The overall average AWR for the legislation category is 4.48. In terms of relative importance, the BCEA (AWR = 4.58) was rated most important and the OHSA (AWR = 4.36) least important. Majority (six out of nine) of the topics recorded AWRs greater than the "Average" AWR of 4.5.

DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study were fourfold fold. The first was to determine the importance that school managers in two South African education districts attach to selected in-service school management training topics. Analysis of means using AWR (Table 4) as well as T-tests (Tables 5 and 6) revealed that school managers rate all the examined topics as being important for improving their managerial effectiveness. This result indicates that despite previous trainings, school managers still need more in-service training. It also goes to suggest that previous training efforts might not have been successful – something that seems to confirm the study suspicion.

The second objective was to determine the relative importance of topics for each management level. Using cross-tabulations (Tables 7 and 8) we found some

Table 7. Cross-tabulations to show rating of importance of topic categories as seen by various levels of managers according.

Management position	Topic category								Means	
	HRM		FM		GM		LG			
Principal	4.51	(3)	4.30	(4)	4.58	(2)	4.60	(1)	4.50	1
Deputy principal	4.39	(3)	4.33	(4)	4.44	(2)	4.45	(1)	4.40	3
HOD	4.48	(2)	4.35	(4)	4.53	(1)	4.39	(3)	4.44	2
Mean	4.46	3	4.33	4	4.52	1	4.48	2	4.45	

Table 8. Cross-tabs for relative importance of topic categories as seen by levels of managers.

Management level	Rank order of relative importance of categories			
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Principal	LG	GM	HRM	FM
D. Principal	LG	GM	HRM	FM
HOD	GM	HRM	LG	FM

Table 9. School managers' perception of the importance of human resource management topics.

Question	Topics	"Average" AWR (Table 4)	AWR	Rank
23	Communication	4.45	4.58	1
17	Performance management	4.45	4.52	2
20	Managing diversity	4.45	4.52	3
18	Training and development	4.45	4.51	4
21	Grievance procedures	4.45	4.51	4
16	Job analysis	4.45	4.43	6
22	HR information systems	4.45	4.39	7
19	Health and safety	4.45	4.38	8
15	Recruitment and selection	4.45	4.28	9
	Average	4.45	4.46	3

Table 10. School managers' perception of the importance of financial management topics.

Question	Topic	"Average" AWR (Table 4)	AWR	Rank order
32	Budgeting	4.45	4.55	1
24	Basic bookkeeping	4.45	4.35	2
29	Interpreting balance sheets	4.45	4.35	2
28	Interpreting income statements	4.45	4.33	4
26	Compiling balance sheets	4.45	4.32	5
27	Compiling cash flow statements	4.45	4.32	5
30	Interpreting cash flow statements	4.45	4.32	5
25	Compiling income statements	4.45	4.28	8
31	Fundraising	4.45	4.19	9
	Average	4.45	4.33	4

interesting information. Table 8 in particular is very revealing. It shows that both principals and deputy principals attach the same relative importance to training topics that is entirely different from the relative importance that HODs attach to the training topics. This revelation is consistent with the roles of the three levels of managers as discussed earlier. As mentioned earlier, the role definitions of both principals and deputy principals is

Table 11. School managers' perception of the importance of General Management topics.

Question	Topic	"Average" AWR (Table 4)	AWR	Rank
34	Decision making	4.45	4.65	1
38	Planning	4.45	4.64	2
37	Motivating	4.45	4.58	3
36	Controlling	4.45	4.54	4
35	Directing	4.45	4.52	5
41	Strategic management	4.45	4.51	6
33	Leading	4.45	4.49	7
42	Information management	4.45	4.48	8
40	Project management	4.45	4.38	9
39	Delegating	4.45	4.36	10
	Average	4.45	4.52	1

Table 12. School managers' perception of the importance of Legislation topics.

Question	Topic	"Average" AWR (Table 4)	AWR	Rank
46	Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) (Act 75 of 1997)	4.45	4.58	1
43	Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)	4.45	4.57	2
44	South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act 86 of 1996)	4.45	4.57	2
45	Labour Relations Act (Act of 66 of 1995)	4.45	4.55	4
50	Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (Act 1 of 1999)	4.45	4.46	5
47	Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998)	4.45	4.45	6
48	Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998)	4.45	4.39	7
51	National Code on HIV/Aids Management in the Workplace	4.45	4.39	7
49	Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) (Act 85 of 1993)	4.45	4.36	9
	Average	4.45	4.48	2

essentially the same (see the national department of education NDoE's personnel administrative measures - DoE, 1999). It is therefore not strange that both levels of managers have the same relative importance for the topical categories. Again, it is not surprising that legal topics rank highest (Table 8) on the list of principals and deputy principals. Considering the fact that principals and deputy principals must ensure that every aspect of the school management is done according to legal require- ments, it is not surprising this should rank highest. That general management ranks highest on the list of HODs is not surprising at all given their role definition which is largely controlling and coordinating (part of general management). Another interesting finding is the ranking of financial management as the least important by all levels of management (Table 8). This is surprising because one would have thought it will receive higher ranking than it did. Considering the fact that financial management is a critical issue in any organisation, this lack of interest in financial management must be worrying. It may well be that school managers do not necessarily see it unimportant. Rather, like any learner, it could be that they find the topics in this category difficult hence they are less interested in them. Nonetheless, this

issue needs further investigation.

The third objective was to make generalisations con- cerning school managers' training needs for the whole of South Africa. Judging by the findings from the current study, it seems fair to suggest that the majority of school managers in South Africa would be interested in being trained in the proposed topics. However, the results suggest that all levels of school managers will be most interested in being trained more in laws regarding school management. This indicates lack of knowledge in this area or it may signal that school managers in South Africa are being overwhelmed by the legal framework within which they have to manage. Extrapolating the findings from the sample data to the rest of South Africa would also suggest that both principals and their deputies would not mind being trained together and in the same topics since the sample data shows the same rating patterns for topics.

The fourth objective was to make generalisations concerning selection of training topics for management training in general. The findings from the sample data gives credence to the normative assertions that different levels of managers may be interested in being trained in different topics precisely because of the differing roles

they play. The roles of principals and their deputies are largely the same (DoE, 1999) and this was reflected in their rating of the topics to be the same. Similarly, the prescribed roles of HODs are largely different from those of principals and deputy principals (DoE, 1999) and again this was reflected in the pattern of rating of importance. This shows that where managerial roles differ, training needs are bound to differ.

All the above go to confirm what Carlson (1981), Dickson (1983), Kiesner (1984), Reid (1987), Adams (1998) and others have variously been saying that management training programme failures result from training course contents that: (i) are not reflective of the real problems of trainees, (ii) do not reflect the priorities trainees (iii) that are too generalised and/ fail to meet the specific needs of trainees; and (iv) fail to take into personal characteristics such as age, educational background, previous work experience and willingness to participate in training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that all management training courses in general and in-service training efforts for school managers specifically must begin with a needs analysis that involves the active participation of trainees. This is perfectly in line with classical motivation theories from the literature that suggest that people are more motivated to do something when they are involved. This suggestion renders the practice of selecting topics based on the recommendations of some "expert(s)" obsolete.

The study also recommends that the NDoE should consider conducting a nationwide survey of training needs for school managers. In doing this the paper recommends that the studies should be focused starting from school to school, and then aggregating to district, region, province and finally national level. Doing this will enable the specific needs of each entity (the individual manager, school, district, region, province, and the nation as a whole) can be determined so as to avoid generalising the training courses thereby avoiding the problems associated with generic courses that do not meet individual needs.

A further recommendation is to researchers who may want to include background factors other than management level to include variables such as education, experience etc to find out whether these variables have any significant effect on rating of the importance of training needs. Also, others may want to replicate the study in other settings in South Africa to validate our findings.

These issues immediately raise the limitations inherent in the study. Firstly, like in any research endeavour, on hindsight, the study believes that it could have done better in some respects. For example, the analysis was confined to only one predictor variable, that being level of management. However, the study feel justified in limiting

the predictor variable to only one as knowledge creation is known to be incremental and not so much a "big bang" thing. The study has already suggested other possible variables that other researchers can consider. A second obvious shortcoming that critics may easily pick up is not doing a significance test for differences observed in the relative importance of topical areas as assigned by the various levels of managers (Tables 7 and 8). It must however, be borne in mind that like any research, the scope and depth of analysis is determined by a number of factors including the purpose of the study. It is admitted here that this shortcoming was no omission.

In fact, because the study was only for a mini-dissertation for the award of a master's degree, the analysis had to be kept to a certain level of depth as such the study could not do a more detailed analysis. All these said, it was believed that the quality of the current study has not been significantly compromised.

Conclusion

In-service training can be important and beneficial to the NDoE, school managers, and the schools they manage in numerous ways. For the school manager, training provides the mechanism through which knowledge of school management areas, attitudes towards their managerial roles, and the skills they need to perform various management tasks can be improved. Also, the knowledge, new attitudes and skills acquired through training can lead to the personal development of school managers. For example, school management knowledge acquired by a head of department can lead to future promotion to deputy principal, principal and even higher. For the individual schools and the DoE, improved school management knowledge and the acquisition of new attitudes and skills by school managers can lead to them performing their roles better. This in turn should improve the school's chances of realising its goals. This makes in-service training so important for school managers. Unfortunately the indications are that in-service training efforts for school managers in South Africa are failing to deliver required results.

Reasons for training failures can be many. However, not considering trainee views in the selection of training topics stands out as one of the key reasons most trainings fail. Through the literature review we have established that this is usually the case. Through this study we have provided a framework for including trainee views. This has led us to identify the most important training needs for school managers in two educational districts in South Africa.

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