



## Case Study 9

### HR/OD Intervention Focus: Engineering Project Management to Addresses DepEd's Classroom Shortage

#### Enhancing DepEd's Quality Management System and Procurement Scheme

During the opening month of each school year, Problems confronting the Department of Education (DepEd) and the education sector in the Philippines, particularly the sorry state of

school buildings and classroom shortage, make the news during the opening month of each school year. Some schools have to hold classes in unfinished school buildings or dilapidated ones. The Unit Head of Physical Facilities & Schools Engineering Division (PFSED) – Project Management Unit of the DepEd, Antonia Alhambra, is aware that she shares in the responsibility to address this problem and says, “Isa talagang goal kasi ng DepEd is to address classroom shortage. (One of the main goals of DepEd is to address classroom shortage.)” One of the major concerns of her unit is the quality of the school buildings being constructed. She explains that they have to make sure that specifications and standards are met by all school building projects. An effective monitoring and documentation system for concise progress reports is needed because this will minimize backlogs and fast track construction. This is the role and responsibility of PFSED.

However, Alhambra acknowledges a big gap in her unit's ability to perform its functions because of her weaknesses in monitoring and documentation. The opportunity to bridge this gap came from the learnings and knowledge she acquired when she was granted an Australia Awards Scholarship (AAS) through PAHRODF.

#### Timely road to scholarship

The scholarship targeted technical staff such as herself who has a degree in Engineering and Architecture. Alhambra felt particularly blessed when she was awarded an AAS to pursue Masters of Engineering Project Management at the University of Melbourne in 2011.

The challenge of being alone in another country was made more bearable because of the assistance given to her by PAHRODF. She was provided with a student mentor, who was always

around to introduce her to the university and her new 'home'. Even her colleagues in DepEd were supportive and kept her posted on what was going on in their office.

Alhambra knew that the knowledge she acquired is exactly what she needed to come up with a plan to address the problems and concerns of her organisation, specifically in monitoring and documentation.

### **Project enhanced by timely learnings**

Alhambra shared that they did not have the proper tools or system to accurately document details on the construction of a school building and its progress. She further explains, "Although ginawa namin yung quality management sa pag-monitor ng school buildings... mahina kami sa documentation. Gusto ko maka-develop ng manual or tools para properly ma-document yung proof na nasunod yung mga plans and specifications ng mga tinatayong buildings. (Although we were already implementing quality management in monitoring school buildings, we were weak when it came to documentation. I wanted to develop a manual and corresponding monitoring tools to guide our documentation process in order to ensure that the plans and specifications are followed correctly.)"

She happily notes how timely the scholarship and the learnings came. When she returned from Australia, DepEd was undertaking the School Building for Basic Education (SBBE) project, of which she was the Project Coordinator. It was in this project where she focused her REAP. The objective of her REAP was to improve PFSED's quality management system by formulating a detailed monitoring and documentation manual.

In addition to the scholarship, the Government of Australia, a major DepEd partner and funder of the SBBE, provided resources to support her REAP implementation. Additional support provided funds for the hiring of a technical consultant to help PFSED develop the monitoring tools and manual based on the inputs of area managers and project engineers from the different regions and the conduct of seminars and workshops on monitoring and documentation.

The manual developed by Alhambra and her colleagues serves as a guide for the DepEd Central Office which undertakes macro-level monitoring, since actual implementation is done at the Division level. With proper guidelines from the manual, the DepEd Central Office is assured that building plans and specifications are thoroughly met.

### **Monitoring tools**

As a companion document of the manual, Alhambra and her colleagues also developed monitoring tools like the Inspection Logbook. This logbook is not only for the use of Project Engineers. During the seminars and workshops, it was determined that school principals have an important role in monitoring their school building and classroom construction since they are always present in the school. They can observe the progress of the construction. With proper orientation and training on the use of the logbook, they can participate in the documentation.

### **PPP, another timely learning**

Another learning that Alhambra got from the scholarship was on Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Upon Alhambra's return from Australia, she was pleased to know that DepEd has started PPP for school infrastructure to address classroom shortage. She states, "Maswerte naman kasi

nung nasa Australia ako, isa yon sa mga napag aralan ko na scheme of procurement. When I came back, may naka-propose na project on PPP. (Luckily, when I was in Australia, we also studied about it as a procurement scheme. When I came back, a PPP project had already been proposed).” She was able to put what she learned to good use because she was assigned as the Project Coordinator. Before PPP, funding for school building construction was taken from regular funds and procurement was done through the usual process. Under this system, there were always delays in the allocation and release of funds, which consequently delay project implementation. With PPP for school infrastructure, more classrooms are being built because of the build-lease-transfer scheme. A private partner initially funds the building of schools and classrooms, thus doing away with delays caused by fund allocation. At the same time, this gives the DepEd enough lead time before payment is made. Schools and classrooms get constructed and become ready for use without DepEd having to spend on them first.

### **Groundwork in place: Quantity and quality**

Alhambra feels confident that the groundwork to address the problem of classroom shortage is already in place. She believes that the Government of Australia played a big role in addressing the problem by providing grants for school buildings, school furnitures, and other services for school children. DepEd was able to find a solution to the problem of classroom shortage with the PPP. More importantly, they were able to define what it takes to build quality school buildings. She reiterates, “My plan is really for developing a quality management system manual that can be used as a guide to ensure that all buildings constructed are of good quality.”

The scholarship grant helped DepEd address the problems and gaps it faced with regard to classroom shortage by enhancing its school building construction quality management system and procurement scheme. Alhambra also recognises that her experience in Australia and the new knowledge she has gained enhanced not only her skills and capabilities in performing her duties and responsibilities but also her self-confidence.

For all these, Alhambra expresses gratitude to the Government of Australia and PAHRODF. She is also grateful for the support from DepEd, former Undersecretary Bacani, and her colleagues.

*Antonia Alhambra finished her Masters of Engineering Project Management from the University of Melbourne in 2011. Her REAP focused on improving DEPED's quality management system by formulating a detailed monitoring and documentation manual*