

Influence of Principals' Planning Skills on Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Secondary Schools in Thika Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya

ABSTRACT

Principals' planning skills are crucial in enabling them to develop and implement strategic plans in public secondary schools. However, in Thika Sub-county, many principals have had numerous challenges as far as the implementation of strategic plans. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess principals' planning skills and their influence on implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study was guided by the strategic planning theory and the theory of policy formulation. The study adopted mixed methodology and concurrent triangulation research design. Target population was 773 respondents which comprised 59 principals and 714 teachers in public secondary schools from which 264 respondents (16 principals and 248 teachers) were sampled using Yamane's Formula. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers whereas interview guides were used to collect data from principals. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically based on the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23) and presented using tables and charts. The study established that implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county has been a very difficult and problematic undertaking for principals. This is because many school heads have limited planning skills, which has compromised the implementation process. Many principals lack the ability of principals to mobilize resources, involve stakeholders, identify trained and experienced staff as well as undertake monitoring and evaluation are crucial activities for successful implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools. Thus, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education and education stakeholders should organize seminars and training programmes where principals can be equipped with strategic planning skills.

Keywords: Principal's planning skills, implementation of strategic plans, public secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Educating a nation remains the most critical tool for the development of the society throughout the developing world. For such educational aims and curriculum objectives to be realized, Grant (2011) opines that the quality of education delivered offered to students in any secondary school is dependent on a multiplicity of dynamics such as strategic educational planning. According to Hassan (2011), strategic planning in education entails the application of rational, systematic analysis to the process of educational development with the aim of

making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of students and society.

In the United Kingdom, Goddard and Leask (2012) posit that the successful implementation of strategic plans in schools largely depend on planning skills which principals or school heads have mastered. In keeping with these assertions, Cook (2010) point out that principals' planning skills entail the abilities of secondary school principals to set educational goals, deciding on actions to achieve those goals and mobilizing the resources needed to take those actions. In other words, a principals' planning skills describes how education goals and curriculum objectives will be achieved through the use of available resources. However, many public secondary schools have had numerous challenges as far as the implementation of strategic plans. A report by Cortina (2017), for example, indicates that, in Haiti, 68.4% of secondary schools do not effectively implement their strategic plans, 78.3% do not meet deadlines for particular tasks whereas 67.3% do not understand what is expected of them in the strategic plans. This state of affairs calls into question the effectiveness of principals' planning skills.

In many secondary schools in Mexico, Hanson (2012) asserts that principals' planning skills are considered as the capabilities of school heads to provide tools, organize workshops and effectively implement school's strategic to realize academic goals. According to Hanson (2012), such planning skills include resource mobilization, involvement of stakeholders, identification of trained staff and ability to undertake monitoring and evaluation. McDonnell (2014) opines that principals have roles in implementation of schools' strategic plans in addition to other roles such as teaching and ensuring students' discipline, respecting cultural diversity, establishing reciprocal relationship with families and creating a caring community of learners. In the implementation of schools' strategic plans, principals' ability to plan, personal and environmental factors are critical.

In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, strategic planning is considered as panacea to all management challenges bedeviling secondary schools. In Lesotho, for instance, secondary schools which adhere and implement strategic plans, realize 76.8% of their curriculum objectives (Ntho, 2013). According to Ntho (2013), such secondary schools witness improved human resource relations, prudent use of financial resources, prudent time management, effective utilization of curriculum support materials and maintenance of facilities. In Ghana, Agosiobo (2015) avers aver that, for any school to achieve its objectives, school heads must

implement their strategic plans as the focal point of any organization and operation. However, Agosiobo (2015) asserts that implementation of schools' strategic plans is often very difficult and problematic and requires the attention of school management.

An assessment report by Hope and Timmel (2016) shows that, in Zimbabwe, many secondary schools fail to implement their strategic owing to the inadequacies of school heads. Hope and Timmel (2016) note that many secondary school principals lack the ability to mobilize resources, not able to identify and involve stakeholders and trained staff and above all, undertake monitoring and evaluation skills as strategies for achieving school objectives. This implies that strategic planning in education is key in the attainment of educational objectives and realization of quality education. Ngware, Wamukuru and Odebero (2016) opine that the quality and adequacy of resources such as physical facilities, equipment, teaching and learning materials, all have a direct bearing on quality as they determine how effectively the curriculum is implemented. According to Ngware et al (2016), to achieve this, principals must manifest effective planning skills and acumen. In other words, secondary school principals should have resource mobilization skills, ability to involve stakeholders, identify trained staff to actualize the school strategic plans and manifest ability to undertake monitoring and evaluation.

In Kenya and Thika Sub-county, there is recognition of the efficacy of school principals in actualization and implementation of strategic plans, which are regarded as key ingredients and determinants of schools' performance. In Kakamega County, for example, Mukabi, Olel and Gogo (2020) note that skills which principals have in both strategic planning and implementation are critically important to the success of secondary schools. Mukabi et al (2020) noted that, when trying to assess the reasons for failure of strategic plans in secondary schools, one of the possible reasons is poor planning and the other is poor implementation. In the same token, public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county are also victims of ineffective implementation of strategic plans. A study by Githire (2013) revealed that close 67.4% of public secondary schools do not have sound strategic plans with clear roadmap for implementation. According to Githire (2013), only 37.2% can successfully implement their strategic plans. Despite these assertions, few empirical studies have interrogated the extent to which principals' planning skills influence implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Principals' planning skills are crucial in enabling them to develop and implement strategic plans in public secondary schools. However, in Thika Sub-county, many principals have had numerous challenges as far as the implementation of strategic plans is concerned. As noted earlier, Githire (2013) indicates that close to 67.4% public secondary schools do not have sound strategic plans with clear roadmap for implementation. According to Githire (2013), only 37.2% can successfully implement their strategic plans. Many secondary schools do not meet deadlines for particular tasks as indicated in their strategic plans whereas majority do not understand what is expected of them in the strategic plans. Efforts to mitigate these challenges have not yielded much remarkable progress. Thus, much still needs to be done to assess the extent to which principals' planning skills on implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To assess the status of implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county.
- ii. To determine how principals' planning skills influence implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county;

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the strategic planning theory which was postulated by Evans (2007) which holds that implementation of strategic plans in schools is guided by a 'strategic thinking' approach. This is a less fixed design that is more a flexible learning process that relies on school managers constantly listening and synthesizing what they hear and learn from all sources. The theory assumes that educational planning that propose models or strategies for educational planning practitioners to consider or use, the subject or objects of the educational planning undertaking, addresses what is common to all educational planning specializations and explicate characteristics of educational planning practice. The strategic plan in this scenario is simple and concentrates on very few targets over a relatively short period of time. These plans may be developed using a strategic thinking process which occurs over a series of faculty meetings and a board retreat, which may result in the development of a rolling sequence of project-based reviews and change, focusing each year on one or two departments, key focus areas or program areas. Thus, the rationale of adopting this theory in this study is that it addresses what is common to all planning specializations and explicate characteristics of planning practice. In other words, it appreciates the fact that prudent

educational planning should be collaborative and incorporates all elements aimed at achieving the foundational goals of education.

The study was also guided by the theory of policy implementation which was postulated by Lindblom (1999). This theory is premised on the models of policy change that emphasize continuity, stability, and incrementalism. The risk aversion of policy-makers and the need for political compromises allows for only incremental changes of the status quo. This theory argues that policy changes also take place in the absence of electoral changes and that the standard model conflates the choice of policy issues with the choice of a policy solution given a policy problem. The relevance of this theory in this study is that implementation of strategic plans is critical to the success of secondary schools in realizing education of education objectives.

UNDER PEER REVIEW

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the conceptual framework was based on principals' planning skills reflected through principals' resource mobilization skills, involvement of stakeholders, identification of trained staff and monitoring and evaluation skills which constituted the independent variables whereas implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools constituted the dependent variables. Intervening variables were; government policy and stakeholders' support as shown in Figure 1:

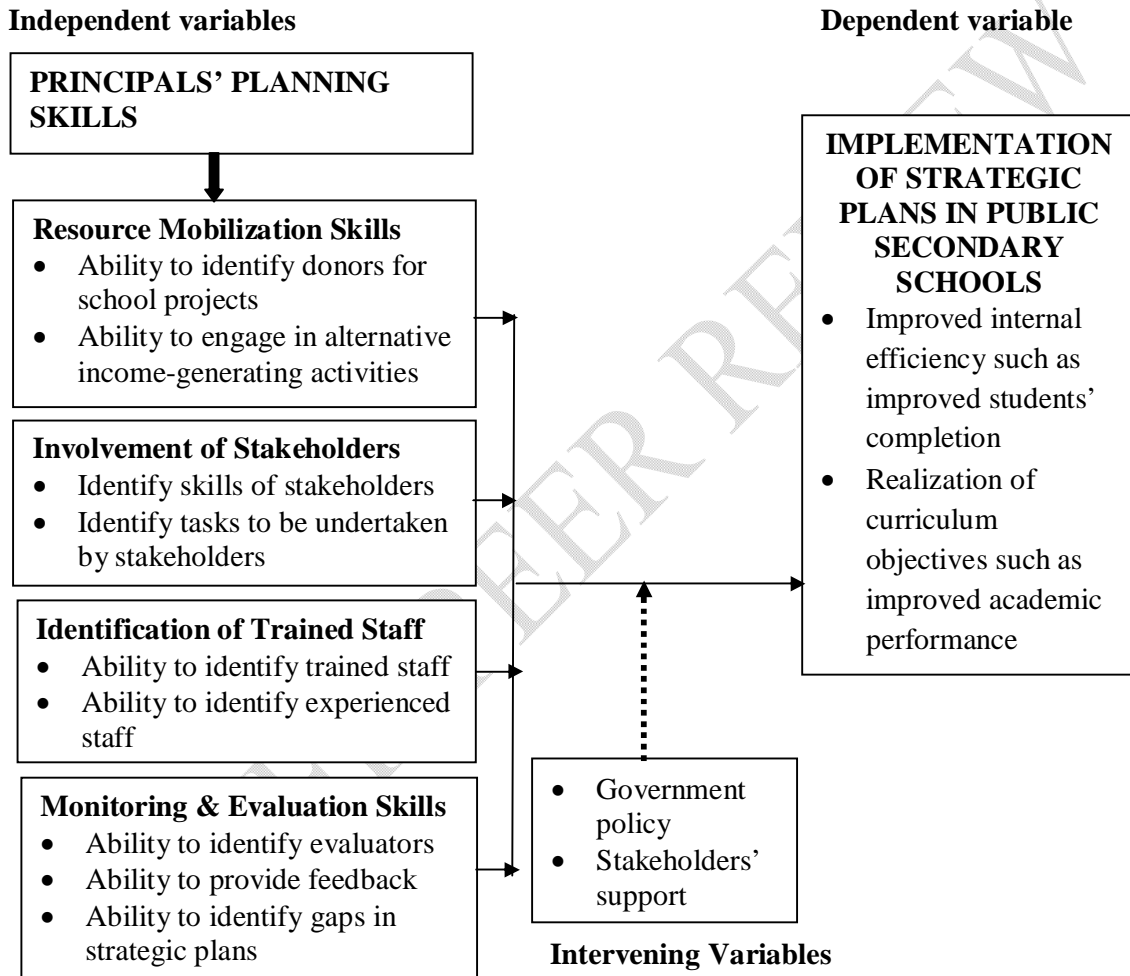


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher (2023)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted mixed methodology and concurrent triangulation research design. Target population was 773 respondents which comprised 59 principals and 714 teachers in public secondary schools from which 264 respondents were sampled using Yamane's Formula. Stratified sampling was applied to create five strata based on the number of zones in Thika Sub-county.

From each zone, two (2) secondary school principals were selected using purposive sampling considering secondary schools which have had challenges with implementation of strategic plans and poor infrastructure development. However, from each zone, 31 secondary school teachers were selected using simple random sampling to avoid bias. This sampling procedure realized a sample of 16 principals and 248 teachers. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers whereas interview guides were used to collect data from principals. Data analysis began by identifying common themes from the respondents' description of their experiences. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically based on the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23) and presented using tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the objective. It also outlines the methods of presentation of the study findings and discussions.

RESPONSE RATES

In this study, 248 questionnaires were administered to teachers and, in return, 241 questionnaires were filled and returned. The researcher also interviewed 13 principals. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1;

Table 1: Response Rates

Respondents	Targeted	Participated	Return Rate (%)
Principals	16	13	81.3
Teachers	248	241	97.2
Total	264	254	96.2

Table 1 shows that principals registered a response rate of 81.3% whereas teachers registered 97.2%. This yielded an average response rate of 96.2% which is consistent with the assertions of Creswell (2014) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate. This information was important since it allowed the researcher to generalize the study outcomes to the target population.

Status of Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Secondary Schools

The study sought to assess the levels of satisfaction with the extent to which public secondary schools implement their strategic plans. The findings are presented in Table 2;

Table 2: Status of Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Secondary Schools

Indicators of Implementation of Strategic Plans	Number of Teachers					
	Satisfied (3)		Not Satisfied (2)		Not Sure (1)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Internal efficiency	96	39.8	125	51.9	20	8.3
Realization of curriculum objectives	113	46.9	97	40.2	31	12.9

Table 2 shows that 96(39.8%) of the teachers were satisfied with the levels of internal efficiency such as students' completion rates in public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county, slightly more than half, 125(51.9%) were not satisfied whereas a paltry 20(8.3%) were not sure. On realization of curriculum objectives such as improved students' academic performance, a fair proportion of teachers, 113(46.9%), were satisfied, 97(40.2%) were not satisfied while 31(12.9%) were not sure. During the interviews, however, principals noted that implementation of strategic plans has been fully realized with levels of internal efficiency (students' completion rates) being high as well as improved academic performance. On further probing, principal, P1, stated;

In my secondary school, despite the challenges, implementation of strategic plans has been effective. Internal efficiency is high with many students progressing and completing their education. Academic performance has improved.

Despite these contradictions, these findings underscore the vitality of prudent implementation of strategic plans in helping secondary schools in realizing their curriculum objectives. These findings corroborate the findings of a study carried out in Kandara Sub-county in which Ngugi (2015) revealed that implementation of strategic plans in schools has been very difficult and problematic task which requires management attention across all level of organization without understanding the challenges. In summary, these findings indicate that, though crucial in many schools, implementation of strategic plans has been a challenge in many public secondary schools.

Principals' Planning Skills and Implementation of Strategic Plans in Secondary Schools

The study sought to examine how planning skills which principals have influence implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools. Descriptive data were collected from teachers and results are shown in Table 3;

Table 3: Teachers' Views on the Influence of Principals' Planning Skills on Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Secondary Schools

Test Items	Ratings in %				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
Principals rarely have resource mobilization skills and thus unable to identify sources of funds to implement strategic plans	51.9	11.2	5.4	5.4	26.1
Principals do not have the skills to involve stakeholders and assign them tasks to help implement strategic plans in public secondary schools	53.5	14.9	5.4	11.2	14.9
Unsuccessful implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools is attributed to principals' lack of skills to identify trained and experienced staff	57.3	9.1	7.5	9.1	17.0
In public secondary schools, principals do not have the skill to undertake monitoring and evaluation of how school strategic plans are being implemented	48.1	18.7	5.4	9.1	18.7

Table 3 shows that 125(51.9%) of teachers strongly agreed with the view that principals rarely have resource mobilization skills and thus unable to identify sources of funds to implement strategic plans as did 27(11.2%) who agreed. However, 13(5.4%) were undecided, 13(5.4%) disagreed whereas 63(26.1%) strongly disagreed. These findings lend credence to the findings of a study undertaken in France by Bray and Lillies (2014) which revealed that, to ensure that smooth implementation of strategic plans, a school head require skills to mobilize financial resources, manage and control of finances. Bray and Lillies (2014) established that resource mobilization often focuses on generating funds, however, it must also include building valuable donor contacts and networks, and earning the interest, support, and in-kind contributions of people important to secondary schools. These findings are indicative of the fact that, though a challenge owing to lack of resource mobilization skills among school heads, successful implementation of strategic plans in secondary schools depend on the resources available in schools and thus, school heads must have the ability to mobilize resources and ensure their prudent use.

A fair majority, 129(53.5%) of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that principals do not have the skills to involve stakeholders and assign them tasks to help implement strategic plans in public secondary schools while 36(14.9%) agreed. However, 13(5.4%) were undecided, 27(11.2%) disagreed whereas 36(14.9%) strongly disagreed.

This contradicts the findings of a study carried out in Colombia in which Hermalin and Weisbach (2016) revealed that strategic planning skills enable school heads to seek the input about strategic planning from stakeholders in meetings, through surveys, with targeted suggestion boxes, in newsletters. Hermalin and Weisbach (2016) revealed that principals, in instances where principals have mastered the skill of involving stakeholders in discussions for strategic planning to the greatest extent possible, schools tend to successfully navigate the process of implementation of strategic plans. This implies the ability of principals to identify the right stakeholders and tasks which they need to undertake through different approaches holds the key to the successful realization of the objectives of strategic plans.

The study also revealed that 138(57.3%) of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that unsuccessful implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools is attributed to principals' lack of skills to identify trained and experienced staff while 22(9.1%) agreed. However, 18(7.5%) were undecided, 22(9.1%) disagreed whereas 41(17.0%) strongly disagreed. This is consistent with the assertions of Samstad and Pipkin (2013) that successful implementation of strategic plans depends on the quality of staff tasked to actualize the plans in secondary schools. According to Samstad and Pipkin (2013), principals must have the ability to identify trained and qualified staff to implement different components of strategic plans. This implies that principals, who have the ability to identify experienced staff, have their secondary schools successfully implement strategic plans. In other words, the success of every strategic plan in schools depends on the quality and quantity of its human and material resources.

Table 3 shows that 116(48.1%) of the teachers strongly agreed with the view that, in public secondary schools, principals do not have the skills to undertake monitoring and evaluation of how school strategic plans are being implemented whereas 45(18.7%) agreed. At the same time, 13(5.4%) were undecided, 22(9.1%) disagreed whereas 45(18.7%) strongly disagreed. These findings are consistent with the findings of a study carried out in Australia in which Cherrington, Hubbard and Luthy (2015) found that, in secondary schools where heads have M&E skills, implementation of strategic plans has been successful. According to Cherrington et al (2015), such skills have enabled school heads to look at what they set out to undertake, at what they have accomplished, how they have accomplished and what is remaining of the strategic plans. These findings further corroborate the findings of a study conducted in Kandara Sub-county by Nyambura, Tanui and Kalali (2019) which revealed that principals

who have had basic training on how to undertake monitoring and evaluation of projects have had their schools realize most of their strategic plans compared to secondary schools where principals are yet to undergo any formal training on M&E concepts. Nyambura et al (2019) found that implementation of strategic in many secondary schools in Kandara Sub-county because many principals the M&E skills to help them actualize the requirement of the plans and constantly review strategies for implementation and reporting procedures on a continuous basis. This implies that M&E skills are important to principals since they are tools which help them to know when strategic plans are not working, and when circumstances have changed. In other words, such skills give school heads the information they need to make decisions about the school projects and about changes that are necessary in strategy or plans.

Inferential Analysis

To verify the influence of principals' planning skills on implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools, data were collected on how often principals of the sampled public secondary schools adhere to planning procedures (Very Often = 5, Often = 4, Sometimes = 3, Rarely = 2 and Never = 1) and the levels of satisfaction (Satisfied = 3, Not Satisfied = 2 and Not Sure = 1) with the extent to which strategies plans have been implemented in the sampled schools. The results are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Frequency of Principals' Adherence to the Planning Procedures and the Levels of Satisfaction with Implementation of Strategic Plans in Secondary Schools

Frequency of Principals' Adherence to the Planning Procedures	Levels of Satisfaction with Implementation of Strategic Plans
1	1
2	1
1	2
4	2
1	1
4	3
3	3
3	2
1	3
4	3
1	1
3	2
2	1

Table 4 shows that, in public secondary schools with principals who have planning skills and thus, adhere to the planning procedures, implementation of strategic plans is satisfactory.

These results were subjected to Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis and the results are shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Principals' Planning Skills and Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Secondary Schools

		Principals' Planning Skills	Implementation of Strategic Plans
Principals' Planning Skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.565*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.044
	N	13	13
Implementation of Strategic Plans	Pearson Correlation	.565*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	
	N	13	13

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 indicates the existence of a strong correlation between principals' planning skills and their ability to implement strategic plans in secondary schools ($r(13) = 0.565$, $p = 0.044$ at $\alpha = 0.05$). This implies that the ability of principals to mobilize resources, involve stakeholders, identify trained and experienced staff and undertake monitoring and evaluation is crucial for successful implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools.

Thematic Analysis

During the interviews, however, the principals noted that they have resource mobilization skills which has enabled them to identify sources of funds to implement strategic plans. Principal, P2, observed;

I have the ability to mobilize resources to ensure that my secondary school's strategic plan is implemented.

Despite these conflicting views, role of resources for successful implementation of strategic plans cannot be overlooked. Just as indicated in quantitative findings, these views further affirm the fact that successful implementation of strategic plans in secondary schools depend on the resources available in schools. On the question of stakeholders' involvement, the principals stated that they often involve all stakeholders and trained staff while drawing strategic plans who would ensure their successful implementation. Principal, P3, noted;

In my secondary school, stakeholders together with trained staff are crucial pillars in the implementation of strategic plans. Thus, I always ensure that I involve everyone with right skills and experience to help in achieving the objectives of the strategic plans.

On the question of monitoring and evaluation, the principals stated they often follow how school strategic plans are implemented. Principal, P4, observed;

In my school, I ensure that I source for evaluators who would help me understand all the steps for successful implementation of strategic plans. This has helped me undertake M&E throughout the implementation process.

From these findings, planning skills which principals have play a key role in successful implementation of strategic plans in secondary schools. In other words, such skills give school heads the information they need to make decisions about the school projects and about changes that are necessary in strategy or plans.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the study findings, it is evident that implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Thika Sub-county has been a very difficult and problematic undertaking for principals. This is because many school heads have limited planning skills, which has compromised the implementation process. Many principals lack the ability of principals to mobilize resources, involve stakeholders, identify trained and experienced staff as well as undertake monitoring and evaluation are crucial activities for successful implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and education stakeholders should organize seminars and training programmes where principals can be equipped with strategic planning skills.

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