

Leadership imperatives for improving policy monitoring and evaluation in the South African Public Service

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ABSTRACT

The role that leadership plays in the process of policy monitoring and evaluation cannot be overemphasised. As with most human activities, leadership is a central theme that could initiate and support policy performance and management, including policy monitoring and evaluation (M & E). Leadership, in this context is all about the art of influencing people with a view to getting them to strive willingly towards the attainment of prescribed goals through effective monitoring and evaluation. In theory, this vision of effective monitoring and evaluation could be embraced by all spheres of government. The extent to which leadership is working towards the actualisation of this vision by putting in institutional processes to support the function across the South African government (national, provincial and local government) especially in local municipalities is yet to be seen. This article presents the current status of the institutionalisation of M & E across a selection of local municipalities, and provides suggestions for improvement.

The argument made is that without strong leadership to institutionalise this culture of M & E through the translation of the vision and without adequate preparation and contextual readiness for the implementation of government wide monitoring, much will not materialise. The article presents and analyses literature on M & E in South Africa, the extent to which M & E has been institutionalised particularly in the local sphere and advance arguments for strengthening leadership for effective monitoring and evaluation in the South African context.

INTRODUCTION

With governments in Africa and in this instance South Africa under increased pressure to improve service delivery, it has become important to ensure that the resources utilised



in various activities, bear tangible fruits. To ensure that this is the case, the utilisation of available resources has to be monitored to ensure that activities they are being used for are carried out effectively.

In the South African context, this vision of streamlining M & E is driven from the top with the Department of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation located in the Presidency. However, this needs to be brought into and strengthened in the other spheres of government. This will ensure the creation of a visionary society (in this context, various groups of individuals or public officials specially tasked with ensuring the realisation of the goals of a policy) to support the monitoring and evaluation vision and nurture this culture that the government wants to create. The desktop review was conducted by means of navigation through the provincial websites, to ascertain the positioning of M&E structures therein, brief telephonic interviews were conducted and feedback was obtained from relevant participants.

LEGISLATIVE PARAMETERS

Following the ten year review (1994-2004), the ANC led government recognised the need for improved policy monitoring and evaluation. This is against the backdrop that although much has been achieved in terms of providing services to the majority of South Africans, much still needs to be done. Furthermore, over the past few years (2005-2012) large numbers of demonstrations were held as a result of community frustrations over the inability of government to provide expected services or where those services are provided, the quality has been less than desired. In light of this recognition, the ANC government under former President Thabo Mbeki approved the *Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System* (GWMES) as a basis for a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system that encompass validation and verification systems, early warning mechanisms, data generation, quality analysis, decision-making and reporting. The implementation seems to have been finalised under President Jacob Zuma's administration which came into power in 2009 with the creation of the Department of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation. This is a department in the Presidency to drive the function of monitoring and evaluation across the national, provincial and local governmental landscape of the country and headed by a minister.

A number of principles underpin the policy framework for a government-wide monitoring and evaluation system. These key principles are;

- Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) should contribute to improved governance through improved
 - Transparency – All findings in monitoring and evaluation processes should be publicly available, however, there are exceptions when the circumstances are deemed compelling.
 - Accountability – the utilisation of resources by public officials is open to public scrutiny
 - Participation – The voice of the historically disadvantaged is going to be heard
 - Inclusion – Traditionally excluded interest groups are represented throughout the monitoring and evaluation processes
- M & E should be rights-based
- M & E should be development-oriented (with a pro-poor orientation)

- M & E should be undertaken ethically and with integrity
- M & E should be utilisation-oriented
- M & E should be methodologically sound
- M & E should be operatively effective

The policy framework for government wide monitoring and evaluation suggests that government's position is pro-participative monitoring and evaluation. Strength for the participative monitoring and evaluation is that it harnesses existing capacities (within and outside government) through a range of strategies including the creation of external learning networks. These learning networks could include sections of the public or selected civil society groupings, depending on the sphere and policy being monitored and evaluated. In this article, focus is on the extent to which local municipalities are geared to monitor and evaluate service delivery activities with internal institutionalised processes.

CURRENT STATUS OF M&E INSTITUTIONALISATION

Prior to 2009, there had been efforts to institutionalise performance management across the South African public service. The results were mixed as there were challenges and successes with its implementation. With the creation of a new department, a policy framework for the government-wide monitoring and evaluation system was developed. The department and its mandate are derived from section 85(2)(c) of the South African Constitution. A key objective is to “monitor the performance of individual national and provincial departments and municipalities” (DPME 2011-2012 annual report). A fundamental point of departure is to present what exactly M & E entails and the extent to which that is present or absent at local municipalities.

A monitoring and evaluation system is defined as “a set of organisational structures, management processes, standards, strategies, plans, indicators, information systems, reporting lines and accountability relationships which enables national and provincial departments, municipalities and other institutions to discharge their M&E functions effectively” (Presidency 2007). The definition commences with the set of organisational structures as this provides the space for all the other formal processes to be engaged. In addition to these formal managerial elements are the elements of organisational culture, capacity and other enabling conditions which will determine whether the feedback from the M&E function influences the organisation's decision-making, learning and service delivery record (Ibid).

Though the GWM&E framework's intention was not to be prescriptive but to encourage M&E good practise (Presidency 2008:3) the definition of an M&E system necessitates its establishment across provinces if effectiveness and efficiency is to be attained in service delivery. In pursuit of the ideal provided in the definition of an M&E system, in furthering good practice, a desktop review was undertaken to determine if the M&E function was well established to execute the required mandate at 145 selected local municipalities.

With a national framework developed, provinces and municipalities were expected to implement M&E in their various activities. In order to execute these M&E activities, there was a need to institutionalise M&E by adopting appropriate institutional structures. Below is the data collected by the researcher on the extent of institutionalisation (where there were

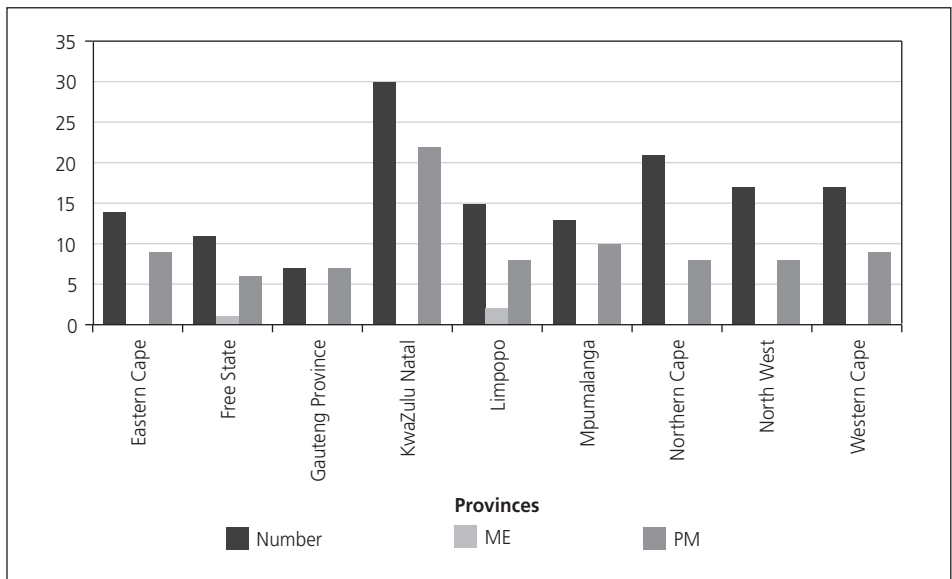


Table 1 showing the institutionalisation of M&E at selected local municipalities.

Provinces	No of municipalities	Institutionalised Monitoring and Evaluation
EC	14	0
FS	11	1
GP	7	0
KZN	30	0
L	15	2
MP	13	0
NC	21	0
NW	17	0
WC	17	0
Total	145	3

Source: Researcher's own primary data

Figure 1 M& E institutionalisation versus Performance management



Source: Researcher's primary data

clear policies, dedicated structures in an organogram with appropriate capacity) of M&E at local municipalities.

The data above shows a dismal institutionalisation of M&E with only 4,8% of the local municipalities profiled having made substantial progress in terms of the proper and effective functioning of the M&E as per the framework developed by national government.

On further evaluation of the data, it would appear that while there was little institutional architecture for effective monitoring and evaluation, the fact that performance management was introduced much earlier showed that there was sketchy and partial institutionalisation of performance management in various local municipalities, with fewer municipalities having the right architecture for M&E activities. (This data is from findings of 145 municipalities selected for this survey).

The above suggests that much work needs to be done to institutionalise M&E across local municipalities in South Africa. This is particularly pivotal given that most developmental projects are undertaken in the local sphere. Without a dedicated M&E unit in the municipalities, it is almost impossible to track progress on time, and ensure that intended results are actually delivered.

With a dismal picture emerging, an interrogation of what might be main challenges that have contributed to this poor institutionalisation of M&E in the local sphere highlights a range of possible factors including: *Firstly*, it would appear that there is a fragmented implementation of M&E at municipalities. This could be better achieved with a clear development framework in place to assist the various municipalities given that their levels of capacity are significantly different. *Secondly*, there seems to be fear and resistance from administrators, who argue that M&E could become a punitive activity and a tool in the hands of politicians. *Thirdly*, in instances where there may have been progress in terms of institutionalising M&E, these have not necessarily been seen to its completion and raise the issue of lack of compliance as these structures have not necessarily been established. This may be due to deeper challenge of getting the right capacities (including measurement skills) especially to local municipalities.

Fourthly, a weakened or ineffective culture of participation is present which could support M&E, including through the use of effective IGR mechanisms. Lastly the lack of strong leadership commitment to translate M&E vision may very well be challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that M&E is institutionalised at local municipalities.

Given the above, what can be done? A number of recommendations are presented in the next section as pointers to improve the current status quo in terms of the institutionalisation of M&E at local municipalities.

Elements for strengthening and institutionalisation of M&E

Develop strong leadership to drive M&E in the local sphere

Leadership in the South African public service, especially in the local sphere of government is about ensuring that the local policies are developed and streamlined with national strategic directions and in a manner that improves the quality of lives of local people. Effective M&E presents the opportunity to align local delivery with developmental objectives by ensuring that the services promised are indeed tracked and being delivered on. This is even more vital given the large number of protests that have been experienced in the local sphere, where communities have staged several demonstrations due to none or poor pace of service delivery.

At the broader and macro level, what is required is transformational leadership that enables and sustains the change that the society needs. Such transformation leadership will include political leaders, religious leaders, and organisational leaders. The aim is to muster



a drive amongst leaders to act in a manner that facilitates greater commitment towards this vision and subsequently improved policy performance. This transformational leadership effectively builds bridges and harnesses leadership strengths across the various sectors. Thus, it requires leadership for policy monitoring and evaluation to evolve into a sustainable culture in the public service and is not here today and gone tomorrow.

Strengthening complementary relationship amongst leaders

M&E can thrive in the public sector if there is recognition of the value that *both* the political and administrative leaders play as collective as well as other complementary roles that other leaders from various sectors including community leaders can play. Currently, leadership faces a range of challenges. Some of these include issues of motivation, ethics, systemic challenges as well as capacity limitations. A situation further weakened by a competitive, rather than a complementary relationship between the administrative and political classes. This needs to be managed to ensure that the opportunity that M&E presents is embraced and actualised for the benefit of South Africans. The leadership interface sought must be outcome-oriented and should endeavour to improve the current levels of service delivery. This requires the ability to organise, learn and act with one another to construct more complex social, economic and political relationships which are necessary for development to occur (Wunsch & Olowu 2000).

Community leadership and citizen participation

Citizens as recipients and stakeholders of policy, programme and project implementation need to be aware of their responsibilities and obligations in terms of making sure that policies are monitored and appropriate feedback provided for consideration in decision making. This has increased the use of participatory M&E approaches, where agency representatives, internal and external stakeholders all work together in designing and carrying out related exercises. Cahn and Camper (1968) note that citizen participation "...promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual, taps the energies and resources of individual citizens and provides a source of special insight, information, knowledge, and experience, which contributes to the soundness of community solutions". This includes policy monitoring and evaluation. Citizen participation can be facilitated if there is an appropriate structure for expressing interest. However, people will not continue to participate unless the experience is rewarding or at least not too distasteful (Ibid).

Purposeful citizen participation calls for citizen involvement, such as in referenda or elections and "...should be a trickle-down process that ensures that benefits so derived would gradually improve the lot of the poor "(Rajan 2002). People can feel obliged to participate in an operation when some aspect of their way-of-life is threatened and they feel committed to be supportive of the activity (Knight, Chigudu & Tandon 2002). Citizens should also be encouraged to participate in programmes when they have a better knowledge of an issue or situation. Mandaza (1998) maintains that popular participation connotes the process by which the efforts of the masses themselves are combined with those of central government.

IGR processes should be strengthened

Existing IGR structures can be used as springboards to ensure buy-in for effective M&E implementation amongst the various spheres of government, and also amongst both political

administrative officials, particularly the local sphere. This will in turn ensure that M&E activities are mainstreamed and included in various plans, with clear goals and targets to ensure the smooth and effective delivery of key services.

M&E is a process, which needs to be nurtured and embraced as part of the public sector culture

Leadership should appreciate the fact that the development of a sustainable culture of M&E in the public service but particularly in local municipalities is never going to be achieved overnight or as an event. It can only be sustained if it is viewed as process requiring a great deal of nurturing on the part of leadership and participation on the part of officials, to ensure consistency in compliance and empowerment on the part of the local communities (including developing local skills for improved participatory M&E).

CONCLUSION

The function of M&E is vital for optimal effectiveness in local municipalities. While the framework may be in well-developed and driven by the DPME in the presidency, it would appear that local municipalities need to do MORE to ensure that the function of monitoring and evaluation is effective. Currently, the M&E function is not institutionalised at most local municipalities and appears weak. This raises the need to ensure that the process of institutionalising M&E is nurtured and embraced by the lowest sphere of government, where most services are delivered to the people. In this regard, the extent to which political leadership positions monitoring and evaluation is vital, ensures that administrative leaders also embraces this as an on-going activity. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation should not only be the vision of the top management, but the vision must be implemented broadly to ensure that the M&E culture is institutionalised, and thus, effective.

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