

# KZN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT MONITORING AND EVALUATION: PROGRESS AND TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

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## ABSTRACT

One of the major challenges facing government departments is to improve in service delivery. This cannot be done unless the Department has a clear picture of their present effectiveness and what is required of it in terms of service delivery to the communities it serves. Introducing a monitoring and evaluation programme would encapsulate all these requirements but it obviously has many challenges, such as resistance to change, greater accountability, better planning and proper reporting. The paper sets out some of the challenges faced by the Department during this process as well as indicates some of the processes which had to be adopted in order to become more effective.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Government's major challenge is to become more effective in service delivery. Through the process of monitoring and evaluation the public sector can evaluate its performance and identify the factors which contribute to its service delivery outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation is uniquely orientated towards providing its users with the ability to draw causal connections between the choice of policy priorities, the resourcing of those policy objectives, the programmes designed to implement them, the services actually delivered and their ultimate impact on communities. It contributes to an evidence base for public resource allocation decisions and helps identify how challenges should be addressed and successes replicated. Monitoring and evaluation is, however, extremely complex, multidisciplinary and skill intensive. As far back as the year 2000, the Department realised its responsibility in this regard and established a component for Monitoring and Evaluation.

## 2 CHANGING THE CULTURE OF THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS

In any large organisation any new programme of any magnitude cannot be introduced unless the staff, at all levels, in the organisation are prepared for such an event. As the concept of monitoring and evaluation was new to all staff it was necessary to train and prepare members of staff for the new programme.

A culture needs to be developed in the organisation that will address the following challenges:-

Accountability: Very little accountability rests with specific individuals as responsibilities are often shared, poorly defined and not related to line function outputs.

Planning: As budgets of most government departments are rolled forward from one financial year to the next, means that incomplete projects can be rolled over into a following financial year without many negative repercussions.

Reporting: Very little reporting was traditionally done by most departments, and then often annual reports contained little information relevant to customers being served or products delivered.

Setting targets: As most government activities are administrative in nature or involve a lot of administration in its execution, the setting of targets is often neglected and the real deliverables unidentified. As a result, numerous targets were set which were non-core in function, and often these enjoyed more attention from management than the real service delivery outputs.

Making improvements: Very little, if any, recognition was given to suggestions proposed by employees for service delivery improvements as the basic culture was that of rewarding employees for introducing more strict and stringent controls in the form of additional forms to be completed, records to be kept and procedures to be adopted. Seldom was the question asked; “does this improve service delivery in terms of output, quality and cost.”

Changing the culture within the Department will not occur if only employees at one level are involved, as employees at all levels within the organization must be trained in understanding the need for planning, setting targets, measuring performance and making improvements.

A programme was adopted in the KZN Department of Transport in which all officials at all levels were trained in the basic requirements mentioned above and were instructed to produce weekly/monthly output charts in visual form for easy reference by all staff. From the lowest level within the Department staff were sensitised to evaluating for themselves what their purpose is within the organisation, how and with what the attainment of that purpose will be measured as well as what is required in terms of input to deliver the identified output. Staff were also given the freedom to choose what would be a reasonable level of performance which would guide the setting of targets for daily, weekly, monthly and annual outputs. At all levels these measurables were recorded in visual format so that all members of staff, whether literate or not, were able to monitor the attainment of targets by all components. This visual measurement programme helped to obtain buy-in from members of staff down to the lowest level.

It's against this background that the function of monitoring and evaluation can be performed as the culture of target setting and performance measurement is in place.

### **3 REPORTING PERFORMANCE**

All major components within the Department had to restructure their reporting frameworks to allow for no more than four levels of reporting. In this regard the normal supervisory functions were divided as follows:-

Level 1 teams would report to a level 2 supervisor, similarly level 2 would report to a level 3 supervisor, and the level 3 supervisor would ultimately report to the head of that component, region, directorate, etc.

At local level, teams were encouraged to report performance at least two levels above their own status, i.e. level 1 teams would report performance to a level 3 supervisor, from time-to-time, in order for management to be aware of output performance as well as challenges being faced by teams. Similarly, level 2 supervisors would report directly to the level 4 supervisors at regular intervals. This information is further cascaded upwards to the level where regions report against stated targets and approved budgets.

The major challenges experienced by the Department in this field were:-

- 3.1 Changes to planned performance/projects – as planning is done many months before actual execution, often as a result of weather or other external influences, changes have to be made to the proposed plan. If these changes are not carefully documented and records kept of performance, targets obviously will not be met by the end of a particular period.
- 3.2 Inappropriate indicators of line function outputs – often it is difficult to identify the correct measurable which would be an indicator of the required impact desired or service delivered. As a result, components within the Department may recommend the measurement of deliverables which will not truly reflect the status of attainment of a particular objective.
- 3.3 Delays in supplying information - this is an issue of particular concern at the end of a reporting period such as a financial year when performance needs to be reported against expenditure for a specific year. Over/under reporting will obviously influence not only the year being reported on but also the following year as deliverables not reported will be added into the new year.
- 3.4 Inaccurate information – this is an aspect which would include errors made in statistics reported, for example, arithmetic mistakes and also errors made in reporting deliverables against incorrect outputs.
- 3.5 New members of staff – the great shortage of technically qualified staff and the inability of government to attract new staff means that the department is experiencing a large turnover of staff in most of the technical divisions. As a result this would mean that members of staff responsible for the capturing and processing of technical information often need to be trained at short intervals. As senior members of staff are also in short supply, training cannot be performed when required resulting in inaccurate and lack of information in certain reporting months.
- 3.6 Information reporting system – at present the information reporting system used is an Excel based data sheet requiring a weekly data capture process. The information requirement for this department is rather large and complex resulting in members of staff reflecting a negative attitude towards the compilation of the information. Ideally a very basic user friendly system needs to be implemented at ground level in order to spread the load of data capturing to all levels in the Department.

As a result of the challenges identified above, the verification of reported information is a very important element in the reporting process to ensure accurate and reliable information.

#### **4 VERIFICATION OF REPORTED INFORMATION**

From what has been discussed thus far it will be clear to the reader that the verification of reported information with regards to statistics shown, actual projects completed, and type of work performed, etc., is very important.

Not all projects reported on can be visited and verified in the field, as a result of insufficient staff and resources available. Only projects which appear erroneous in the reporting format are visited as well as random samples of other projects. As a rule, attention is generally given to the more important deliverables in terms of budget expenditure and the attainment of service delivery to community members.

The importance of this function is emphasized by the fact that Provincial Treasury also undertakes infrequent random checks on completed projects.

The verification process also needs to evaluate quality and standards. Obviously with a variation in standard, quality is often compromised and performance improved. As most work is being done by contractors for the department, this verification process also assists in evaluating performance of supervisory staff within the system. Contractors performing poorly are often as a result of the inexperience of new contractors as well as the inexperience of departmental supervising staff. Reports issued to the executing office would include comments on the observed inadequacy of departmental supervision, over and above the facts pertaining to the actual outputs being reported on. Although this can be seen as a policing function, in its positive context, it is a good opportunity by senior members of staff to perform training and the transfer of much needed technical skills.

Engineering judgment is often required to be exercised when evaluating project quality and quantity in relation to its need. What must be borne in mind is that some projects are of lower importance than others and that the cost of insisting on specific standards to be met are exorbitant in these specific areas. For example, in the sandy North Eastern parts of the province where good quality material is hard to come by and often very far from a specific road, whilst at the same time, traffic volumes are low; regravelling standards can be compromised in order to reflect the reality of the situation. As a result, the project with the reduced quality standard will be reported in the same way as a regravelling project of the required standard.

Similarly, road blocks by road traffic inspectorate staff on busy routes require a large number of staff members whereas a road block on a quiet road may be performed by two members of staff only. In line with what is stated above, both these two operations will enjoy the same deliverables status, i.e. both are counted as a roadblock held.

This verification process does not incorporate an investigation into the attainment of stated objectives or departmental aims as it is purely a verification process for reporting actual performance against stated targets to management and central government. Value for money and the attainment of stated strategic and operational objectives would be the basis for customer need and impact assessments done by the department. In other words, even if all the stated outputs have been achieved for a particular deliverable a separate investigation needs to be done in order to evaluate value for money or the attainment of stated strategic goals.

## **5 EVALUATING CUSTOMER NEEDS AND IMPACT OF DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMMES**

Government often announces specific initiatives to address particular areas of concern in society. In this regard we can consider, for example, job creation, contractor development, training, etc.

The Department needs to identify which of its deliverables directly or indirectly influence any of these specific objectives and then from time to time evaluate its effectiveness. Similarly, components within the Department may require investigations into the effectiveness of its service delivery or programmes in relation to its target audience. Once these have been identified, it then becomes the responsibility of the Monitoring and Evaluation component to do the research and publish its findings.

Most of the research conducted involved the questioning of beneficiaries of specific programmes as well as line function staff involved in these activities. Once results are known, managers may make adjustments to operational procedures, budgets, programmes or the training of staff, in order to achieve required objectives.

By its nature, this kind of investigation can be at macro or micro level but the investigations are often dictated to by budget constraints and manpower availability. However, this type of exercise does give management a feel for the relevance of their programmes and projects in relation to the needs of communities and the public.

For example, the following evaluation reports have been completed recently:

- 5.1 Customer satisfaction – Departmental frontline officers
- 5.2 Time & motion studies on field support officers (FSO's)
- 5.3 Impact of student driver education programme
- 5.4 Relevance and impact of existing liaison structures

Although some of the findings in these evaluation reports may require major adjustments to be made in the way we do business and what we do; often progress in this regard is hampered by financial constraints and staffing shortages.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

No organisation can improve on service delivery if it does not have sufficient information to tell it where it is, what its shortcomings are and where it should be. In this regard a monitoring and evaluation system, as described above will assist management greatly in making the correct decisions and improve upon service delivery.

The challenges identified within the KZN Department of Transport are not impossible to overcome provided that managers use the information at their disposal in decision making. From the experience gained to date, it is becoming more obvious that the task to monitor and evaluate needs to rest in the hands of experienced engineers in order to be objective and realistic of the results achieved. Also, sophisticated data collection and information processing programmes will assist in eliminating much of the administrative challenges associated with the process.

A monitoring and evaluation system which is fully operational and provides information to managers to manage properly will have as real winners the community and civil society.

The new and innovative programmes introduced by the KZN Department of Transport in recent years is indicative of the fact that the culture of monitoring and evaluation is being entrenched in the routine functions of this Department and its members of staff.