

CHAPTER TWELVE

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS' PERFORMANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation of government departments is critical in South Africa and beyond as it safeguards good governance, which enforces transparency, efficiency and accountability (Dipela & Mohapi, 2021). The South African Public service performance is always under scrutiny as most departments are found wanting in the delivery of basic services to the citizens of the country. The chapter reveals some of the main reasons that hamper the effective monitoring and evaluation of the South African government departments' performance. Relevant literature was examined to determine the common barriers that impede effective performance monitoring and evaluation in South African government departments. The chapter adopted a qualitative research approach. The chapter uses secondary data to determine barriers to effective performance monitoring and evaluation. The collected secondary data was derived from sources such as government reports, (the Public Service Commission annual reports, the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation guidelines), academic articles on monitoring and evaluation by various scholars such as (Matsiliza, 2019; Jili & Mthethwa, 2016; Dipele & Mohapi, 2021) to mention a few. The findings of the chapter reveal that issues such as capacity, lack of expertise, time, resources, coordination, and lack of political will and management support are some of the barriers to effective performance monitoring and evaluation in South African government departments. If these identified barriers are not addressed, government performance monitoring and evaluation will remain a problem in the foreseeable future. It is advised that the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) develop and implement a comprehensive performance monitoring and evaluation programme as a means of ensuring adequate performance and service delivery by all government departments.

The Presidency and offices of the premier are the nerve centre of government in South Africa since they uphold the political principles necessary to execute their respective executive powers that are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). In 2010, the DPME was established to, among others, introduce the outcomes approach to detailed planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation; promote monitoring and evaluation in government; and monitor the performance of

individual national and provincial departments and municipalities (Public Service Commission, 2021). The DPME is the custodian of planning, monitoring and evaluation in government and collaborates with offices of the premier to coordinate the functions of the state, oversee the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP), and drive government performance through monitoring and evaluation (DPME, 2017).

In a quest to improve service delivery after the transition to a democratic state in South Africa, the South African government created a government-wide monitoring and evaluation (GWM&E) system that would aid in the measurement of the performance of all government departments. For this reason, government departments were forced to adopt and implement the M&E system proposed by the national government even though they were not ready for it (Eresia-Eke & Boadu, 2019). A few years into the implementation of M&E to monitor government performance, it has been discovered that there are factors that impede the effective monitoring and evaluation of government departments' performance. M&E is the process that allows policymakers and programme managers to assess how an intervention evolves over time (monitoring), how effectively a programme was implemented and whether there are gaps between the planned and achieved results (evaluation); and to further determine whether the changes in well-being are due to the programme and to the programme alone (impact evaluation) (International Labour Organisation, 2017).

According to the (PSC,2024) between 2010 and 2017, National Evaluation Plans (NES) were published and over 60 evaluations had been completed and a review of the implementation of the National Evaluation System found that although most of the earlier evaluation brought positive changes to government programmes and policies, it was later found that over the years of reporting on the implementation of improvement plans that departments were inconsistent or weak when it comes to reporting for various reasons. Departments raised concerns over reporting burdens, and this resulted in departments not actively reporting on progress made which hindered the DPME ability to account for changes and impact made through these evaluations. Since the DPME and the office of the Premier are tasked with an essential responsibility of ensuring that the planning, monitoring and evaluation of all three spheres of government is successful, it is important that the Presidency further empowers them with authority to hold all poor performing institutions accountable. Writing report about poor performance without taking any action to address the problem serves no purpose. The DPME & the offices of the premier in each province should be tasked with the training responsibilities of all other departments on how best they should manage and monitor their own performance to meet the set standards at the end of each financial cycle.

This chapter discusses the barriers to effective performance monitoring and evaluation of the South African government departments. It further provides recommendations regarding what could be done to improve the government-wide performance.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The concepts monitoring and evaluation are often seen as one and used interchangeably; however, these concepts are different. Otieno (2000) defines monitoring as a continuous process of assessing a programme or project in relation to the agreed implementation schedule that provides much needed information used by the main stakeholders and management to make decisions based on real facts and proof. Monitoring is a vital management tool which should, if used effectively, provide continuous reliable feedback to the stakeholders and management to enable them to identify potential success and failures and facilitate timely decision. On the other hand, evaluation refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy, or programme (McDavid, Huse and Hawthorn, 2018). Evaluation can be seen as assessment that is as systematic and objective as possible, regarding a planned, on-going, or completed development intervention (PSC, 2021/2). Monitoring is

collecting, analysing and reporting data on inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts as well as external factors, in a way that supports effective management, while on the other hand, evaluation is a time-bound and periodic exercise that seeks to provide credible and useful information to answer specific questions to guide decision-making by staff, managers and policymakers (The Presidency, 2007). Monitoring and evaluation cannot be easily separated if proper results are expected. Monitoring is a continuous process that collects data on agreed indicators to inform the organisational leaders and stakeholders of an ongoing project. Monitoring indicates the extent of progress as compared to the objectives, while “evaluation is defined as the interrupted assessment of ongoing and completed projects (OECD, 2002). Evaluation is a comprehensive appraisal that looks at the long-term impacts of a project and exposes what worked, what did not, and what should be done differently in future projects (Jamaal, 2018). Monitoring is a continuous process by which stakeholders obtain regular feedback on progress towards achieving the set milestones and results (often focusing more on process, activities, inputs and outputs).

IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN GOVERNMENT

Performance monitoring and evaluation of institutions is important to ensure that departments follow the set procedures and standards when working towards a set goal or target. Continuous monitoring on project implementation is critical since it aids in detecting mistakes or failures at its early stages and further helps to provide correction before resources and time are spent on wrong activities that will not help in achieving the set target. Worldwide policymakers and institutions are forced to continuously monitor and evaluate their institutions’ performance. Continuous performance monitoring and evaluation offers several advantages that every organisation should have. Performance monitoring and evaluation involves assessments that serve a vital role in providing information that is geared to aid departments, administrators, and policymakers take informed decisions (Shahiri & Husain, 2015). A monitoring and evaluation system is a set of organisational structures, management processes, standards, strategies, plans, indicators, information systems, reporting lines and accountability relationships that enables national and provincial departments, municipalities, and other institutions to discharge their M&E functions effectively (The Presidency, 2007).

M&E processes can assist the public sector in evaluating its performance and identifying factors that contribute to its service delivery outcomes. Performance monitoring plays a central role in most important current reform efforts (Mayne & Zapico-Goñi, 2017). M&E is uniquely oriented 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 delivered and their ultimate impact on communities. It helps to provide an evidence base for public resources allocation decisions and helps identify how challenges should be addressed and successes replicated. M&E is one of the main contributing factors to any project success (Jahaf, 2018).

CHALLENGES OF MONITORING AND EVALUATING GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT’S PERFORMANCE

One of the main functions of the DPME is to assess the performance of the government departments, analyse data and use the results to strengthen the capacity of the departments to deliver on their mandate. For any project in government to be considered successful, criteria such as time, efficiency, effectiveness, and quality delivery should be satisfied (Jili & Mthethwa, 2016). However, having the M&E system in place does not automatically translate to expected results but rather it requires that certain skills and knowledge to be applied to achieve the desired results. Below are some of the common barriers that impede the effective monitoring and evaluation of the government departments’ performance.