Towards the single-view goal

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THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Efficient monitoring and evaluation can help government become transparent and accountable.

Government has always had the need to monitor the progress of its programmes, projects and strategic development initiatives. But the state of monitoring has been varied. In many areas manual methods are still being used to collect data while most monitoring is based on spreadsheets, which makes it difficult to produce meaningful reports, says Kroshlen Moodley, business development manager, Public Sector division at SAS Institute. SAS has a performance management solution that supports Monitoring and Evaluation, specifically packaged for government.

Government-wide monitoring and evaluation is the mandate of the office of the President, which has made it clear that it wants to move from an efficient to an effective government that is transparent and accountable. But the process will not be without challenges as departments and agencies currently run disparate systems that collect data in isolation, without a consistent standard.

"A lot of disparate tools, systems and solutions are in use in government to do monitoring and, more rarely, to do evaluation," notes Moodley. The first step towards a centralised monitoring and evaluation system is establishing a consistent electronic data collection process. "A major consolidation and aggregation effort needs to happen in government before one can start interrogating departmental information and performing proper evaluation," explains Moodley. "An electronic monitoring and evaluation system ensures that the data is deposited in a single repository, allowing for a single view of a department's performance and ability to understand where things can be improved."

Monitoring and evaluation happens across all three spheres of government, but these efforts are disaggregated, says Moodley. "The challenge for the South African government is to aggregate this information to get a higher degree of integrity of the data so they can then start doing effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation."

Once the information from all government departments is flowing into a central repository, it can be analysed. Government can start running predictive or descriptive modelling, forecasting, optimisation and simulation scenarios in order to understand why something is happening and how changing certain factors will improve effectiveness.

Another critical factor to a successful monitoring and evaluation setup is the management buy-in, or "institutionalisation of management best practice" within government, as Moodley puts it. "Technology is the easy part – SAS has a mature, fully integrated platform, and IT infrastructure and access to web services are readily available. However, the problem lies in people and processes. Implementing electronic monitoring and evaluation is an institutional challenge, whereby the heads of departments need to start being accountable and promoting transparency throughout the department."

The message from government is very clear, notes Moodley: South Africa needs to move from an efficient to an effective government. "Efficient government is able to measure the delivery of output; effective government needs to be able to evaluate the impact their specific projects are having on citizens."

A fundamental principle of good governance is that to be accountable, you need to report, he concludes. "If we leave out all the tech jargon and focus on core management principles, that's a good staring point to doing monitoring and evolving into evaluation."

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