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Implementation Evaluation of the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT)

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Policy Summary

The Implementation Evaluation of the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) was conducted by PDG for the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency. The purpose of the evaluation was to “determine whether MPAT is improving management practices in national and provincial departments. The findings will assist DPME to determine the appropriateness of the framework, its effect on management practices, and how it can be improved” (DPME, 2014a: 2).

While MPAT intends to be designed for assessing management performance, in reality it is a sophisticated, nuanced, compliance assessment of management practice, comparable with the best, known international examples. It is well received by departments with high rates of participation. Stakeholders value this relatively unique assessment tool and find its assessments useful for improvement planning.

There are significant design improvements that can allow MPAT to become more than a compliance assessment tool. Improved conceptual design is needed, particularly in improving how an assessment of management practices relates to good public management outcomes. It also needs to sufficiently cover the most significant contemporary public management challenges. This improved conceptual design will allow MPAT to position itself as more than an assessment system, but one that realises that ongoing improvement in performance is key. It can also play an important role as a catalyst for regular reviewing of the appropriateness and effectiveness of public management policies and regulations.

There are practical improvements warranted for MPAT, most significantly in improving how moderation of self assessments work and how the technology that facilitates the MPAT assessments can be improved.

While detailed recommendations have been made regarding programme design, system development and institutional arrangements, the overarching recommendation is to continue with this programme and build on the energy and momentum it has developed.

Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Implementation Evaluation of the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) was conducted by PDG as part of the National Evaluation Plan of 2013/2014 of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency. The following executive summary sets out the purpose of the evaluation before presenting the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation as stated in the Terms of Reference was to “determine whether MPAT is improving management practices in national and provincial departments. The findings will assist DPME to determine the appropriateness of the framework, its effect on management practices, and how it can be improved” (DPME, 2014a: 2).

1.1 Findings and Conclusions

While MPAT intends to be designed for assessing management performance, in reality it is a sophisticated, nuanced, compliance assessment of management practice, comparable with the best known international practice. Management practice is defined as the sets of requirements (policies, plans, behaviours) required by public management policy and regulation, as an assumed precondition for the achievement of policy outcomes that describe a well-managed public service, defined here as management performance.

MPAT’s design is limited by:

- an emphasis on the purpose of assessment rather than the purpose of improvement,
- a conceptual conflation of management practice and management performance, which are interrelated but distinct
- insufficient KPAs to fully address the contemporary public management challenge,
- imbalance in the measures and composition of some standards,
- inadequate mechanisms for:
 - horizontal learning and improvement
 - support by relevant transversal departments
 - responsive refinement of the standards for validity and sufficiency
 - review and refinement of public management policies that underpin the standards

Of all the other public management tools or processes being used to assess the public service in similar areas to MPAT, the Audit Outcomes of the AG are the most similar. There is a fair amount of duplication and overlap with aspects of the AG audits. Despite posited relationships and apparent congruence between certain MPAT standards and areas of AG findings, the actual correlations are not particularly strong.

Although MPAT is only 4 years old, it is a successful programme of public management assessment, taken seriously by its participants and valued by its stakeholders. Participation is effectively 100% in government, as required by a cabinet resolution, which does raise the potential for malicious compliance potentially undermining MPAT's learning and improvement intentions.

MPAT is supported by strong primary partnerships of three key transversal departments, although institutional arrangements can be strengthened and formalised. DPME as the implementing department has been described as responsive and adaptive, introducing new tools, process elements and actioning feedback, particularly where standards are problematic and need refinement.

However, there were also areas that are not working well and in need of improvement. The following highlights those areas:

- Scheduling and predictability of MPAT timing
- Functionality of technology used
- Moderation & challenge process
- Human and financial resourcing
- Knowledge sharing and learning
- Support from transversal departments
- Appropriateness of policies that MPAT assesses
- The intended purpose of accountability for performance

Year on year comparison of ratings on MPAT shows some evidence of improvements between MPAT 1.2 and 1.3. Of the 29 standards applied across the two cycles, 24 standards saw a net improvement in scores while 5 standards saw a net regression.

It can be cautiously stated that there is evidence of uneven improvements in management practices. Whether these can be causally attributed to MPAT cannot be conclusively determined based on this evaluation design. Further, there is shortage of available data and insufficient analyses necessary to

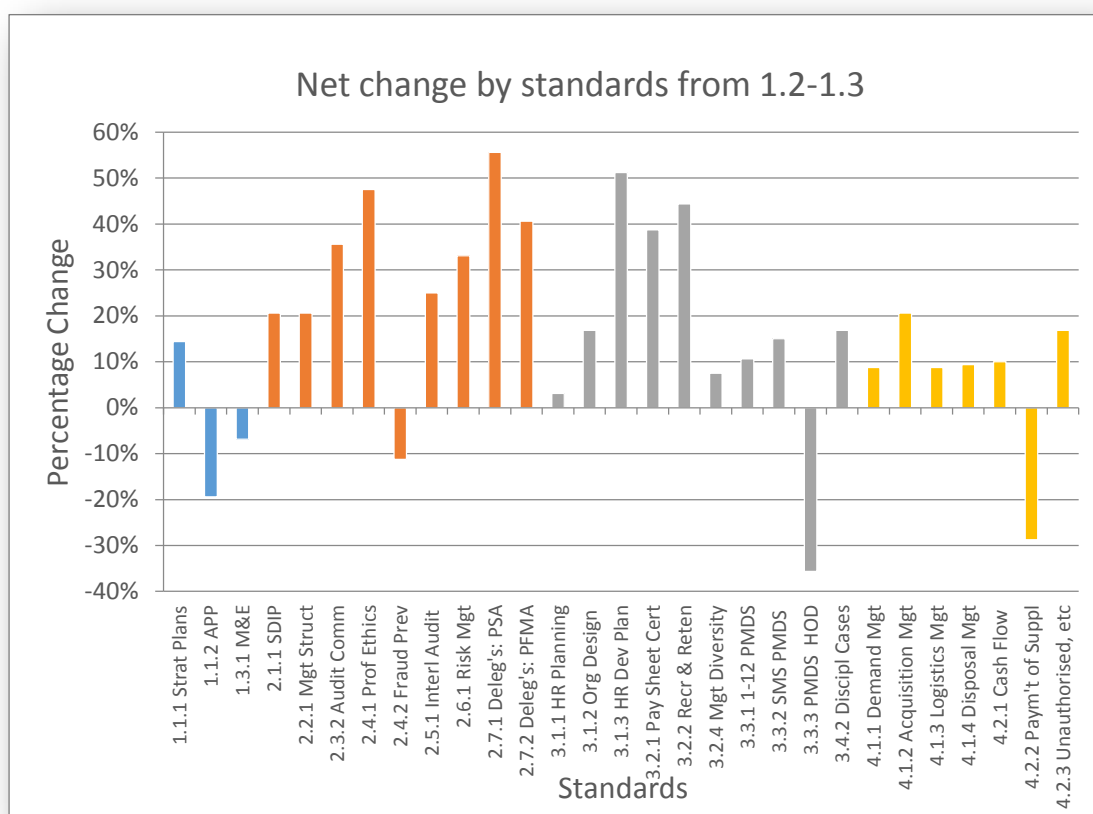


Figure 1: Net change in score by standard from MPAT 1.2-1.3

determine whether the posited improvement in management performance has indeed followed. However, where data does exist, such as in relation to specified human resources management standards, there is no indication, as yet, that improved management practice results in desired management performance improvements. This means that the appropriateness of these standards, and the policies that underpin them are in need of regular review.

Evidence shows that 97.8% of accounting officers surveyed consider MPAT results to be useful to some extent. Departments tend to utilise these results for raising awareness of management practice strengths and weaknesses, accountability as well as for undertaking improvements and corrections.

There is evidence that some offices of the Premier (OtPs) have taken the lead by using MPAT results to coordinate and drive improvements in management practice throughout their provinces, although this is not in all cases and would appear dependent on OtP capacity.

DPME has used MPAT results to continuously improve and adapt its role as custodian of government planning, monitoring and evaluation. This has included pioneering other tools modelled on MPAT at the local government level and in relation to performance monitoring and evaluation.

There is limited evidence that DPSA or National Treasury are using the results to target interventions or provided individual departmental support in the process of undertaking improvements except where specifically requested.

At this time there is some evidence to suggest that the National Assembly is using MPAT results, but little to suggest provincial legislatures are meaningfully using MPAT as part of their oversight responsibilities.

1.2 Recommendations

The overarching recommendation is to continue with this programme and build on the energy and momentum it has developed. The following are the recommendations distinguished between the programme design, system and institutional arrangements.

Programme Design Recommendations

1. Clarify the nature of MPAT as a programme, together with its ownership and key role-players.
2. Clarify the distinction between management practice and management performance.
3. Clarify and define the purpose of MPAT as supporting learning and improvement within departments and across government.
4. The focus areas and standards of MPAT should be reviewed, with an intention to include asset management and information management.
5. The MPAT design and programme theory should emphasise horizontal learning and knowledge sharing as a key mechanism of change.
6. The support roles and responsibilities that partner departments play in terms of the development and implementation of departmental improvement plans should be clarified.
7. MPAT programme design should explicitly cater for the ongoing review of standards and underlying policy.

System Development Recommendations

8. The MPAT intervention should be augmented to include a monitoring system on management performance indicators.
9. The current KPAs and standards should be scrutinised and refined, mainly to separate management practice and performance and to specify the results chain for each.
10. The scheduling of MPAT processes should be predictable and allow departments adequate time for self-assessment, uploading and submission and for results to most effectively inform improvement planning.
11. The MPAT website should be improved in terms of ease of access, duration of availability and capacity of traffic volumes before the next round.
12. The moderation process should be revised to ensure a commonly agreed level of moderator expertise or experience.
13. A formal procedure and tracking system for handling all moderation challenges received should be implemented with provisions for direct engagement where feasible and appropriate.
14. A mechanism should be put in place for the regular review or evaluation of policies included in MPAT, triggered by an analysis of MPAT scores.
15. A longitudinal impact study should be undertaken to evaluate the relationship between MPAT standards, management performance and service delivery performance.

Institutional Arrangement Recommendations

16. A new charter or MOU should be developed between the partners, based on a review of partnership arrangements.
17. A structure to co-ordinate the partnership that manages MPAT should be formalised, with a terms of reference.
18. Partner departments should take on the role of providing improvement support.
19. Multi-departmental, multi-sphere funding for resourcing cross-cutting programme across partner departments should be considered.

Summary Report

1.1 Introduction

The Implementation Evaluation of the Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) was conducted as part of the National Evaluation Plan of 2013/2014 of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency.

In terms of the National Evaluation Policy Framework (2011), this is an implementation evaluation of the MPAT (with design elements) conducted by PDG. The following short report sets out the purpose of the evaluation, methodology employed, the findings and analysis, before arriving at conclusions and recommendations.

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation as stated in the Terms of Reference was to “determine whether MPAT is improving management practices in national and provincial departments. The findings will assist DPME to determine the appropriateness of the framework, its effect on management practices, and how it can be improved” (DPME, 2014a: 2).

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Summarizing the problem statement

The MPAT is built on the idea that “The quality of management practices - how we plan; how we manage staff, finances, and infrastructure; how we govern ourselves and how we account for our performance - has a significant influence on the quality of the outputs our department produces, the outcomes achieved, and ultimately, the impact our services have on society. Therefore, to improve the performance of a department, it is essential that the management practices of a department are assessed and strengthened. Good management practice is a precondition for effective, sustainable service delivery.” (Presidency, 2012: 8)

At the time of MPAT’s introduction, government’s overall performance monitoring system did not provide an overview of the management of the public sector as a whole, although the Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA), National Treasury (NT), the Auditor-General (AG) and Office of the Public Service Commission (OPSC) all have their individual and focused core mandates. However, no one department had transversal perspectives on some of the key areas of management. A need was identified for a tool that would assess the health of management practices of a department and provide the basis to compare all the departments in the public service as a system, while moving beyond the compliance focus of an audit, to focusing on working smartly (PDG, 2014).

1.2.2 History of MPAT

An exercise to diagnose how service delivery could be improved was undertaken in 2010, and a public service delegation undertook a study trip to Canada to study the Management Accountability Framework (MAF) (PDG, 2014). A Technical Committee of senior officials from NT, DPSA and DPME subsequently led the development of MPAT (Presidency, 2012: 5), although the support and level of engagement with these partners has fluctuated over time.

In 2011 Cabinet approved the proposal to develop and pilot MPAT and mandated the roll out. MPAT 1.1 was launched in October 2011 and the results presented to Cabinet in June 2012. Over two subsequent iterations refinements were made to the tool's design and process. MPAT 1.3 was launched in September 2013 and the results presented to Cabinet in June 2014.

1.2.3 Design features

The following reflect some of the key design principles as articulated in MPAT documentation:

- Progressive improvement in management performance
- Ownership of assessment process, results and improvements
- Simple processes and tools
- Evidence-based approach
- Assessment beyond compliance
- Using existing regulations, policies and frameworks
- Continuous improvement of MPAT (Presidency, 2012: 10).

Key Performance Areas and Standards

The MPAT process is designed to assess the quality of management practices in four key performance areas (KPA). In the tool each KPA is broken down into specific sub-performance areas. Each of these specific performance areas is assessed through a set of prioritized quality standards (Presidency, 2011d: 5). Each MPAT standard is defined according to four levels (see the Full Report for more details).

The following four KPAs are:

KPA 1: Strategic Management- it “includes the deployment and implementation of the strategic plan throughout the organisation, the measurement and evaluation of results, and the implementation of improvements based on monitoring and evaluation.” (Presidency, 2013a: 17)

KPA 2: Governance and Accountability- focusing “on a select number of management practices that underpin good governance and promote accountability in public administration.” (Presidency, 2013a: 21).

KPA 3: Human Resource Management- addresses the quality of human resource management practices as they influence on the overall performance of the organisation, and its delivery of services in particular (Presidency, 2013a: 27).

KPA 4: Financial Management – builds on the work of the Accountant General of National Treasury to assess the economic use of public finances (Presidency, 2013a: 33-34).

Process design

The assessment process moves through three cyclical stages:

- Self-assessment and internal validation
- External moderation and feedback
- Improve and monitor (Presidency, 2012)

Implicit in this process is the publication of results, which is open and transparent. The process in effect culminates with a presentation of results and awards at FOSAD and a briefing to the media on MPAT results.

1.2.4 Evolution of MPAT

MPAT grew very fast through the stages of an idea, to a pilot, and then national roll out. Since the initial pilot, there have been four cycles of MPAT, the first three of which fall within the scope of this assessment. MPAT 1.1 (2011/12); MPAT 1.2 (2012/13); and MPAT (2013/14). The latter two iterations introduced an electronic platform for self-assessment and capturing of evidence, as well as the introduction of a moderation and challenge phase. The introduction of these elements are particularly important as they pertain to the implementation of the intervention. See the Full Report for more details.

Over the course of four years of implementation, the four KPAs have remained constant through the 3 cycles of the document but some of the sub-performance areas and standards have changed. In all instances changes have been minimized to allow comparability between years. Minor changes in KPA 1- Strategic Management and KPA 3- Human Resource Management have been noted, while more substantial changes following the first year of MPAT have been documented in KPA 2- Governance and Accountability and KPA 4- Financial Management (See Appendix on Literature Review for full details).

1.2.5 Key concepts used in understanding the MPAT Theory of Change

Management Practice

Management practice here reflects adherence to or exemplification of management standards expected. In the case of MPAT these are largely

compliance standards set by transversal departments with a regulatory responsibility for the public service. Management practice indicates the extent to which adherence to or exemplification of specified management requirements is taking place.

An example of Management Practice is *3.1.1. Human Resource Planning: Departments comply with, and implement, the human resource planning requirements. A Human Resources plan has been developed and approved by the relevant authority.*

Management practice is defined as the sets of requirements (policies, plans, behaviours) required by public management policy and regulation, as an assumed precondition for the achievement of policy outcomes that describe a well-managed public service, defined here as management performance.

Management Performance

It is important to conceptualise management performance as the posited result of management practice. This describes how well the organisation performs in terms of a management outcome. For instance, the expected outcome of the management practice of good human resource planning would reflect in the outcome of a diverse, representative, skilled and stable staffing complement, arguably partially described by some management performance indicators such as:

- % vacancies
- % vacancies more than 3 months
- Turnover / attrition rate
- Employment equity profile (race, gender, disability).

The relationship between management practice and management performance is further explored as part of the findings and analysis section.

Departmental Performance

Departmental performance (service delivery) here refers to aggregate performance of the department, mostly in terms of its mandate, strategic plans and delivery agreements.

The premise of MPAT is that improved management performance (HR management, financial management, good governance and strategic management) are key enablers for service delivery. This principle is widely assumed internationally, although it has only relatively recently begun to be tested. Attribution in this causal relationship is not only difficult to map and account for, but is also lagging in time. Nevertheless, the experiences of

Canada (TBCS, 2014), New Zealand (Ecorys, 2011) and the Governance Performance Project (2005; 2008) go some way to reinforcing the logic of this process.

This is best reflected in the following validated Theory of Change.

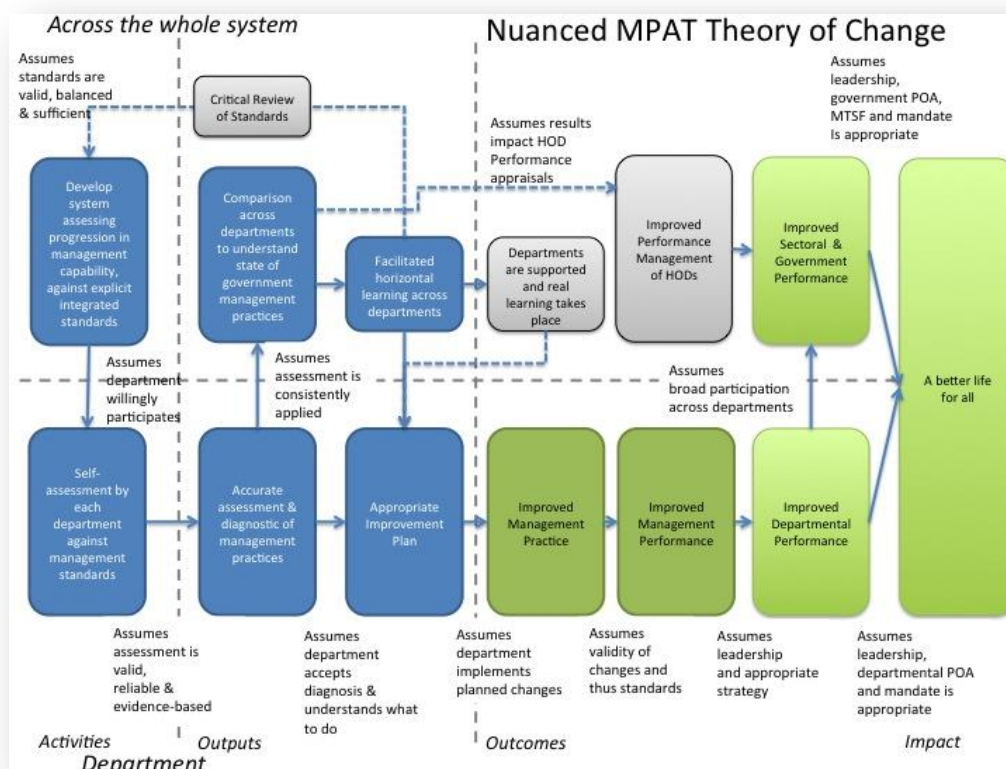


Figure 1: MPAT Theory of Change

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Design Review and Analytical Framework

The first component of the evaluation was to conduct a design review of MPAT by engaging with key design stakeholders, reviewing MPAT documentation, literature and reviewing international experience of with similar systems. More detail can be found in the Full Report and Design Review Report.

1.3.2 Evaluation criteria

The evaluation was conducted using the following criteria.

Relevance - the extent to which MPAT is an appropriate intervention for the public service to improve management performance across national and provincial departments.

Efficiency - the processes through which MPAT is prepared, deployed (electronically) undertaken, signed-off, moderated, finalized and reviewed. Specifically, this criterion is applied to determine how well these processes are executed in respect of utilization of resources.

Effectiveness - judged in relation to the evidence of emergent outcomes in terms of management practice and performance.

1.3.3 Scope

The evaluation was national in scope with national and provincial departments used as intervention sites over the three cycles of MPAT to from 2011-2013 (MPAT 1.1-1.3).

1.3.4 Sampling

Sampling for the evaluation worked from the total population of 155 departments¹ at national and provincial level, but was differentiated by data collection method. Representatives of all 155 departments were included in the sample for the perception survey.

For qualitative purposes, 12 national departments and 4 departments in each of 4 provinces (16 provincial departments in total) were taken to be a meaningful sample. The sample was stratified between national and provincial spheres of government with Gauteng, Limpopo, Free State and the Western Cape the selected provinces.

1.3.5 Data collection

A pilot of data collection instruments occurred in the Western Cape allowing for refinements and improvements prior to roll out in other provinces

1.3.6 Data collection

A pilot of data collection instruments occurred in the Western Cape allowing for refinements and improvements prior to roll out in other provinces.

A structured questionnaire was administered to all DGs or HoDs participating in MPAT over a period of three weeks. 73 DGs or HoDs submitted surveys

¹ Only the Department of State Security was excluded from this sample population as it does not participate in the MPAT initiative given the unique and sensitive nature of its work. Further, a subsequent change in Cabinet has introduced other Departments that previously did not exist, such as the Department of Water and Sanitation and the Department of Women within the Presidency, these were also omitted from the sample population.

electronically. This represents a response rate of 47% for the entire sampled population.

Qualitative data collection took two distinct forms: Semi-structured interviews with individuals and focus groups with groups of respondents (6-8 on average). Focus groups were targeted at line managers and those staff responsible for facilitating performance within the respective provinces and national departments. This accounted for 32 of all focus groups conducted. An additional two focus groups targeting moderators of the MPAT process occurred during the moderation week event in the Drakensberg, where one focus group was conducted with partners representing the transversal departments that have a stake in MPAT's success. In total, 35 focus groups were conducted (20 provincially and 15 nationally) including 265 individuals.

A total of 51 semi-structured interviews were conducted including 57 individuals (34 individuals at provincial level and 23 individuals at national level). Within this sample of respondents, 22 DGs or HODs were interviewed, while 35 individuals acting as MPAT coordinators for a department were interviewed.

Secondary data compilation entailed examining data drawn over the three year period of MPAT implementation (1.1-1.3).

1.3.7 Analysis approach

Each of the respective types of data were analysed independently before being synthesised and integrated into the findings and analysis section that follows. Descriptive statistics were used for the perception survey and disaggregated at the national and provincial levels as appropriate. Qualitative data analysis occurred distinctly for each of the four respective provinces (inclusive of the four comprising departments) and at the national level before being synthesised into the following findings.

1.3.8 Ethical considerations and limitations

Standard ethical protocols were followed for all individuals participating in the assessment and confidentiality of responses has been maintained for all respondents.

The evaluation had some limitations which, while less than ideal, have not resulted in significant deviations from the intentions of the assignment. For more information on ethical considerations and limitations please see the full report.

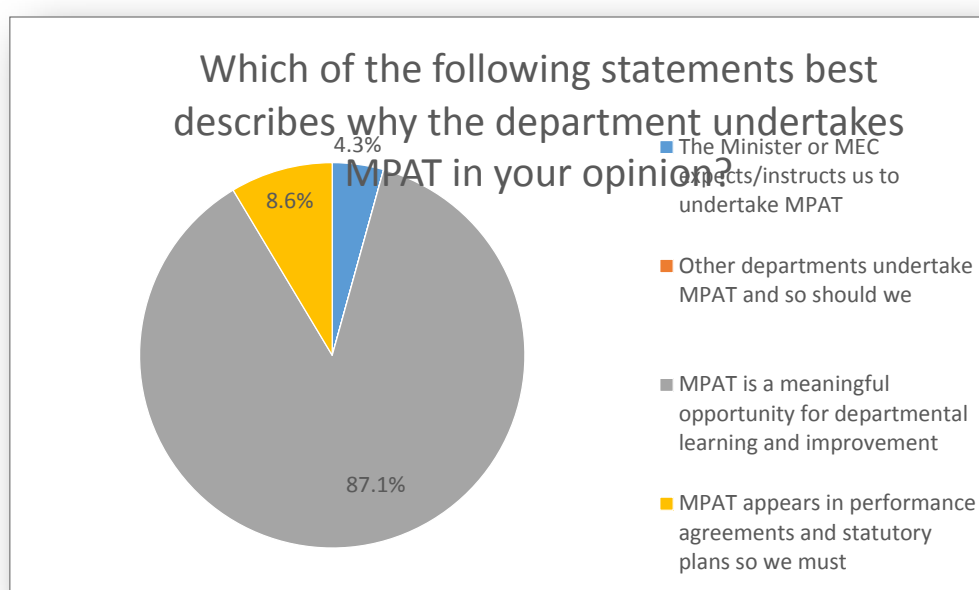
1.4 Findings and analysis

The section is presented by three criteria.

1.4.1 Relevance

The findings present a picture of MPAT that is positive in broad terms as it pertains to the relevance of the initiative. Respondent understandings of the self-assessment process, design and alternative tools were all indicative of the value of this initiative in relation to the challenges of public management practice across the state. High historic participation rates (MPAT 1.1: 65.19%; MPAT 1.2&1.3: 100.00%) and the reasons for participating in MPAT all indicated an acknowledged value in the tool. There is a clear case for stating that the learning and improvement intentions of the tool are something that has been widely embraced and recognised, as well as its unique self-assessment approach. The breadth of management practice issues that it covers along with the level of support it receives at the highest level of the public service leadership distinguishes the initiative from others, albeit with some overlaps. The following figure indicates why chief accounting officers claim to undertake MPAT.

Figure 3: why do you undertake MPAT?



However, there are some concerns around the composition of KPAs and the formulation of standards specifically. Considering the 33 current standards, there appeared to be comparatively few that are specifically identified as problematic, but it is clear that there are some concerns with the composition of KPA 1 and 2 respectively, where the line distinguishing these became blurry for some respondents. Furthermore, the issue of achieving a Level 4 rating was another area where respondents raised concern and indicated that the tool may not actually be demonstrating excellence, especially when one considers the limitation of what it can measure in relation to management practice.

1.4.2 Efficiency

In terms of the implementation of the MPAT process, a number of sub-criteria highlighted potential threats to the fidelity of the programme theory that may result in less than efficient execution. Beginning with tools of the MPAT process, problems were noted with the functionality of the website as well as the time available for uploading of documentation which reflected some dissatisfaction (12.7%) with the tools available. This was supported by qualitative data that indicated particular concerns with the IT infrastructure and insufficient time available given some of the system uploading challenges and limitations.

Only minor issues were raised with the actual self-assessment process within departments, with those issues raised potentially contextual organisational culture challenges rather substantive issues with the design of the self-assessment or the implementation process. The experience of the use of internal audit in vetting the submissions varied to some extent, while there seemed to be some evidence that departments were using this process to better prepare for moderation, where the bulk of the challenges emerging from the focus groups and interviews emerged.

Concerns potentially affecting the credibility of implementation of MPAT focussed on the 'expertise' of the moderators undertaking assessment and the quality of feedback received. Perceptions that moderators were not well-prepared, or failed to fully consider the information available to them were heightened by a lack of meaningful feedback provided, and some accounts of no feedback at all. The value of direct engagement was emphasized as a means of potentially addressing the issues arising from the moderation and were explained as adding to the learning and improvement objectives of the intervention.

Not unexpectedly, the end results of moderation, challenges and finalisation led to considerable declines in the scores received across departments (43.9% of all standards were moderated down), although there were a minority of instances indicating scores moderated upwards as well (5.3%). Combined with the doubts expressed over the expertise and thoroughness of the moderators, this presents a potential threat to the learning and improvement intentions of the intervention as departments feel unfairly judged without sufficient recourse or explanation for negative judgements.

While the process of moderating, challenging and finalising scores takes some time, some departments have seized the opportunity to use their self-assessment results to inform on-going improvement rather than await finalisation, thus displaying an ownership of self-assessment results and mitigating the timing problems of the process. Across all departments, with only a few exceptions, improvement planning is being done by addressing findings

through planning and improvement processes (both through integrating existing and initiating new plans) or by incorporating improvement monitoring as standing items for management meetings.

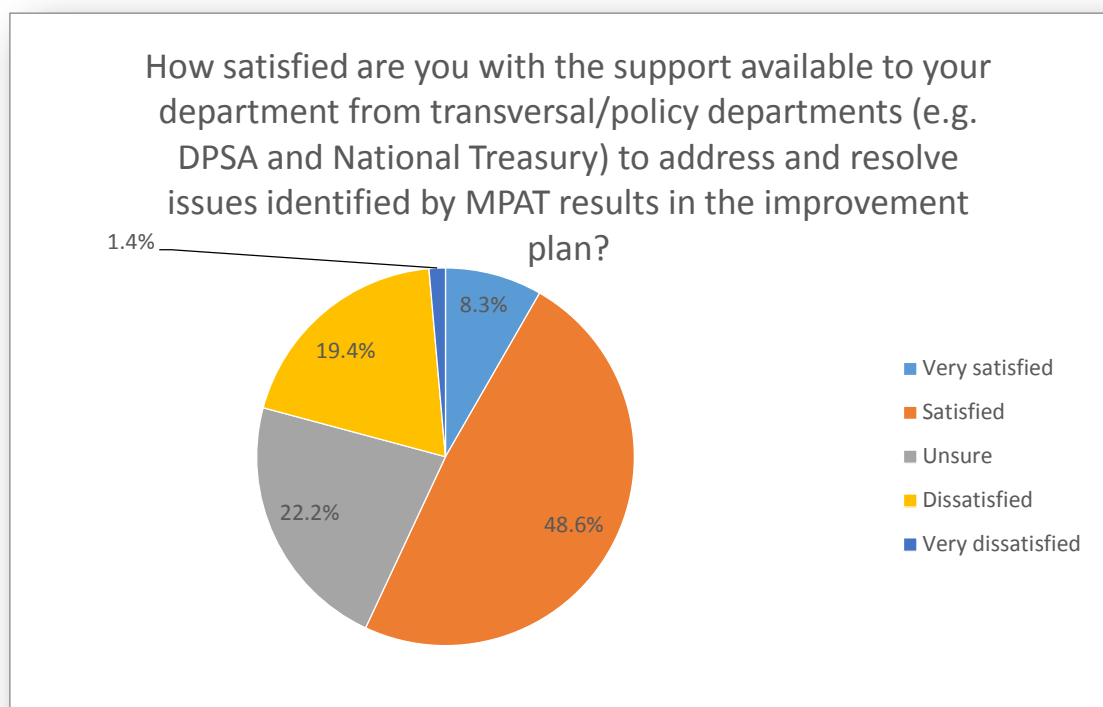


Figure 2: Support from transversal/policy departments

Where there does seem to be some process concerns with the development of the improvement plan output is centred around the support received from the different transversal departments. In this regard, DPSA has been identified as the partner where there is the greatest scope for more meaningful support of the improvement plan process, as the above graph illustrates. Failure to do so undermines the improvement imperative and has been identified by accounting officers as the area resulting in the lowest levels of satisfaction with the MPAT implementation process.

1.4.3 Effectiveness

An integrated analysis of the sub-criteria of effectiveness yields both affirming and concerning findings with regards to the extent to which MPAT has achieved its intended objectives. Beginning with MPAT's own data between 1.2 and 1.3, there is evidence of an overall net improvement on the standards, albeit uneven. Figure 4 below illustrates the net positive change (departments that improved minus departments that declined) for 24 standards, while 5 standards

indicate regression. Some of these five standards have been modified between these two years, partially explaining a possible reason for regression on some standards.

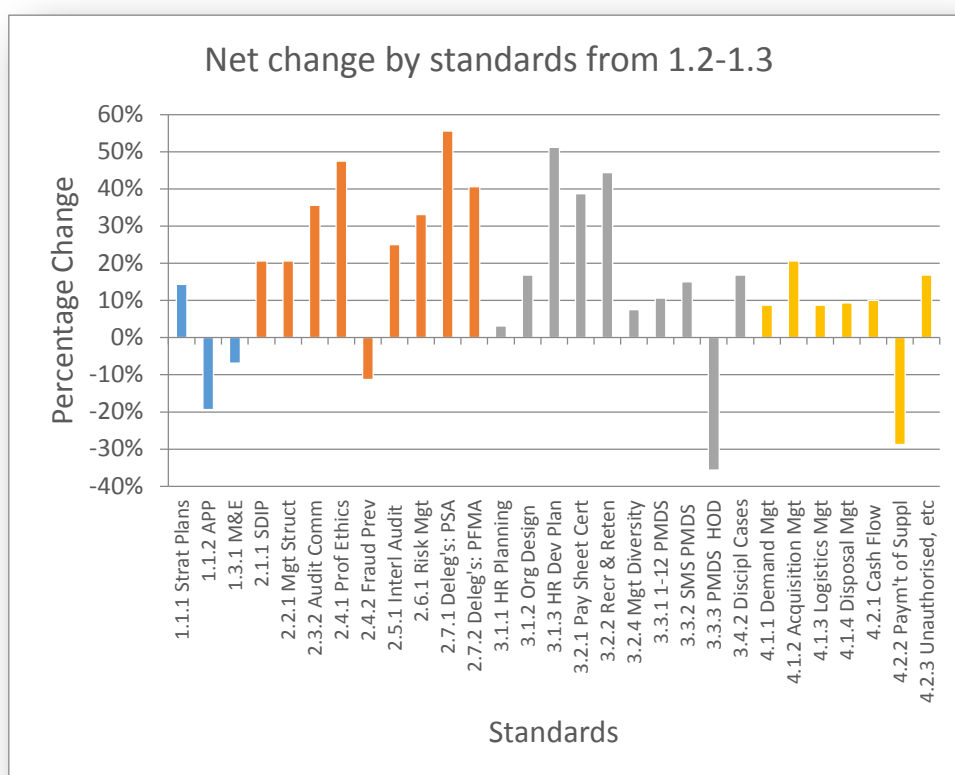


Figure 3: Net change in score by standard from MPAT 1.2-1.3

Chief accounting officers (89.9%) perceive results as accurate to their intent, which is widely understood as compliance to management practice, rather than performance.

Perceptions of the usefulness of MPAT are positive (97.2% indicating some degree of usefulness). This tends to be distinguished between awareness raising and identification of problem areas, for accountability and for improvement. Of these potential uses there were common indications of institutionalised use, particularly in the form of performance planning and agreements, as well as standing items of management meetings.

Respondents indicated the need for MPAT learning events and valued recent DPME-coordinated launches and training, as well as internal department initiatives. References to uptake and learning appeared most beneficial in relation to departmental peer comparisons that took account of similar conditions and contexts. There was a clear indication from qualitative data that the potential for learning has to be fully explored, especially as it pertains to the

nuance of the tool and how learning from results can catalyse management performance improvements.

The correlation analyses undertaken to test relationships between MPAT scores and indicators of management performance have not indicated particularly strong relationships as would have been expected given the posited theory of change. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the average scores of the four KPAs and ordinal audit outcomes.

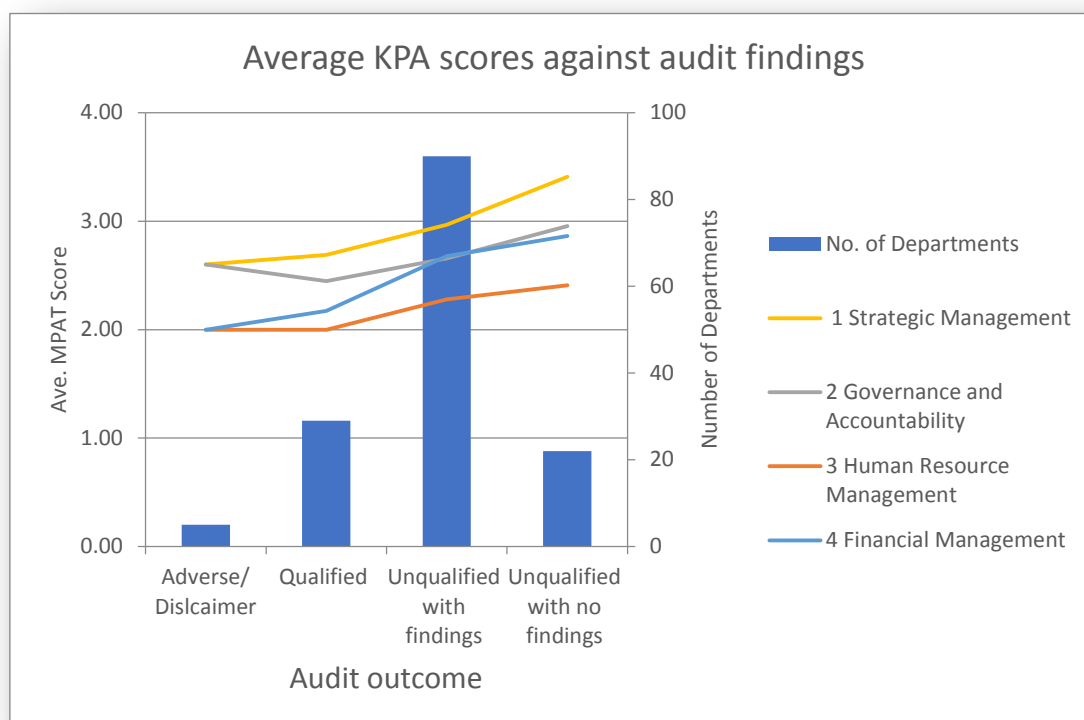


Figure 4: Average KPA scores in relation to audit findings

Although there is some evidence of relationships between KPAs 1 and 4 with the audit outcomes (as illustrated in Figure 5), this is perhaps not as strong as would have been expected and some respondents highlight these inconsistencies when questioning MPAT's benefit. In the areas of governance and accountability and HRM, relationships appear particularly weak, if any.

It has been difficult to isolate areas of MPAT assessment where there exists complimentary, useful and available indicators of management performance, with a strongly posited attribution relationship. The following represent a grouping of such indicators where there arguably should be a strong relationship between these specific HR standards and the specified measures of good HR outcomes.

There is an assumption that an improvement in MPAT scores results in some kind of improvement in management performance. For example, it is assumed that as a department improves in the HRM elements of the MPAT its performance in achieving HRM objectives will be commensurate. Based on the posited theory of change, in looking at all of these areas of HR, namely HR planning, organisational design, the HR development plan, recruitment and retention, etc, one would expect a strong relationship with management diversity and within the external variables such as % of female staff, % of disabled staff, vacancy rates and the average duration to fill a post.

The table below looks at the correlation values against each standard. A coefficient correlation looks at measuring how well a regression equation truly represents a given data set. The correlation coefficient, r , is also known as a linear correlation coefficient, measuring the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables. It should be noted that in statistics, a correlation greater than 0.8 is generally described as very strong, whereas a correlation less than 0.5 is described as weak.

In the table below one can see the representation of the coefficients ranging between $-1 \leq r \leq +1$.

Table 1: Correlations between KPA 3 standards and external variables

	<i>% Female</i>	<i>% Disabled</i>	<i>Vacancy rate</i>	<i>Average months to fill posts</i>
3.1.1 HR Planning	0.0087	0.1204	-0.1290	-0.0516
3.1.2 Organisational Design	0.0241	0.1776	-0.0640	-0.1500
3.1.3 HR Development Plan	0.0034	-0.0711	-0.0668	-0.0207
3.2.2 Recruitment & Retention	-0.1249	-0.0368	-0.0064	-0.0689
3.2.4 Management of Diversity	-0.0846	0.1198	0.0234	-0.0192

In looking at the analysis it is evident that there is no statistically significant relationship between these HR standards and strongly associated indicators of HR performance. However, this analysis does not sufficiently account for the time lag between when a standard is achieved and realising the desired outcome. A longitudinal tracking of these indicators and MPAT scores will help to account for this lag.

Overall, it is found that there is evidence that management practices have undergone some, albeit uneven, improvements as per the intentions of the MPAT initiative, but that has not yet sufficiently reflected in tangible evidence of improvement in management performance.

1.5 Conclusions

1.5.1 To what extent is the design of MPAT appropriate to assess management performance, notably the four KPAs and the indicators that are being used?

While MPAT intends to be designed for assessing management performance, in reality it is a sophisticated, nuanced, compliance assessment of management practice, comparable with the best known international practice. It's design is limited by

- an emphasis on the purpose of assessment rather than the purpose of improvement,
- a conceptual conflation of management practice and performance, a distinction which is key to its purpose and useful implementation
- insufficient KPAs to fully address the contemporary public management challenge particularly when considering the importance of managing and maintaining assets well, and ensuring the best management of information
- a relative imbalance that exists in the number of standards on which KPA 1 is assessed when considering the emphasis given to other standards.
- inadequate mechanisms for
 - horizontal learning and improvement
 - support by relevant transversal departments

- responsive refinement of the standards for validity and sufficiency
- review and refinement of public management policies that underpin the standards

1.5.2 Which other tools in the public service are assessing the same areas/standards as MPAT? What is the extent of the similarities, differences and the correlation (if any) of the MPAT results and is MPAT sourcing appropriately the data from other departments for its 4 KPAs?

The most frequently compared and referenced tool or process being used to assess similar areas to MPAT is conducted through the annual AG audits. There is a fair amount of duplication and overlap with aspects of the AG audits, while AG outcomes are considered as an outcome indicator related to management performance. Despite this relationship and apparent congruence between certain MPAT standards and areas of AG findings, the actual correlations are not particularly strong.

National Treasury's FMCMM is considered to be compliance driven assessment focussing on accounting practice, thereby focussing on a different scope and level of the management practices MPAT addresses. And while DPSA's organisational functionality assessment does take a broader look at the systems, policies and procedures in place, it is largely and diagnostic for an intervention rather than a regular means assessing management practice, significantly based on AG audit findings.

1.5.3 What is working well and what is not working well with MPAT and the process used?

Although MPAT is only 4 years old, it is a successful programme of public management assessment, taken seriously by its participants and valued by its stakeholders. Participation is effectively 100% in government, as required by a cabinet resolution, which does raise the potential for malicious compliance potentially undermining the learning and improvement intentions.

The practice of making results public has contributed significantly to the success of MPAT, by encouraging participation, improvement, oversight and accountability in an assessment system that is seen as credible and fair.

The institutional arrangements that include primary partnerships with DPME, DPSA and National Treasury, on the whole enrich the content of the MPAT assessment, although there are clearly some perceived duplications and redundancies by participants. Co-ordination and integration between DPME and DPSA specifically could be improved.

DPME has been noted to be responsive to feedback on MPAT. Whether this has to do with the available tools and infrastructure, moderation and the

challenges process, or addressing and revising standards, there is evidence that feedback is actioned, particularly where standards are problematic and need refinement. If within the scope of DPME, feedback is incorporated into the next year's assessment tools and the intervention is incrementally corrected.

However, there were also areas that were not working well and in need of improvement. The following highlights those areas:

- **Timing-** The timing of MPAT was raised as a constraint since one month to collect evidence, conduct and submit a self-assessment was deemed inadequate. The timing of results was not as predictable as it could be, and did not adequately feed into processes of improvement planning.
- **Technology-** There were complaints that the web-based software system functioned poorly and could not handle the traffic at the time of submission.
- **Moderation & challenge process-** Moderation and the opportunity to challenge moderated results were consistently identified as the weakest point in MPAT implementation. This has resulted in departments questioning the expertise of the moderators, and their exercise of power to moderate. There was tension between the role of internal audit in departments and that of moderators. It also appears that evidence is not fully utilised in the moderation and challenge process as the amount of evidence is overwhelming and not prudently and strategically requested.
- **Resourcing-** Although DPME is relatively well-resourced in terms of human and financial resources, partner departments are not commensurately equipped, particularly in OtPs where they have a devolved responsibility for managing MPAT.
- **Knowledge sharing and learning-** Knowledge, learning and best practice events have not been as frequent, accessible or well-coordinated as the programme theory would suggest.

- **Support from transversal departments** - Stronger support from transversal departments such as DPSA, either under the ambit of MPAT or through their generalised support function, is necessary.
- **Policy review and refinement**- Problems emanating from the standards may not be confined to the formulation of standards but may relate to the relevance, practicality and appropriateness of policy requirements.
- **Accountability for performance**- There was originally a design intention to hold department heads to account for management performance but this has not happened formally or consistently, although this may not be a bad thing as it could undermine the learning and improvement emphasis. MPAT is not designed appropriately as a tool to be used for exercising accountability.

1.5.4 Is there evidence that national and provincial departments have improved their management practices as a result of the MPAT process? If so, to what extent has this happened?

Year on year comparison of ratings on MPAT shows some evidence of improvements between MPAT 1.2 and 1.3. Of the 29 standards applied across the two cycles, 24 standards saw a net improvement in scores while 5 standards saw a net regression. Stated differently, 39% of MPAT 1.3 ratings were an improvement on 1.2, while a similar amount maintained the same level (37%), and 23% deteriorated. It can be cautiously stated that there is evidence of uneven improvements in management practices. Whether these can be causally attributed to MPAT cannot be conclusively determined based on this evaluation design. Further, there is shortage of available data and insufficient analyses necessary to determine whether the posited improvement in management performance has indeed followed. However, where data does exist, such as in relation to specified human resources management standards, there is no indication, as yet, that improved management practice results in desired management performance improvements. This means that the appropriateness of these standards, and the policies that underpin them are in need of regular review.

1.5.5 Which public service institutions are using the MPAT results? How are they utilising them and what are the benefits?

Evidence shows that 97.8% of accounting officers surveyed consider MPAT results to be useful to some extent. Departments tend to utilise these results for raising awareness of management practice strengths and weaknesses, accountability as well as for undertaking improvements and corrections.

There is evidence that some OtPs have taken the lead by using MPAT results to coordinate and drive improvements in management practice throughout their

provinces, although this is not in all cases and would appear dependent on OtP capacity.

DPME has used MPAT results to continuously improve and adapt its role as custodian of government planning, monitoring and evaluation. This has included pioneering other tools modelled on MPAT at the local government level and in relation to performance monitoring and evaluation.

There is limited evidence that DPSA or National Treasury are using the results to target interventions or provided individual departmental support in the process of undertaking improvements except where specifically requested.

At this time there is some evidence to suggest that the National Assembly is using MPAT results, but little to suggest provincial legislatures are meaningfully using MPAT as part of their oversight responsibilities.

1.5.6 How can MPAT (the framework and tool) be strengthened or changed to improve the attainment of its intended objective?

See the following section on recommendations.

1.6 Recommendations

The overarching recommendation is to continue with this programme and build on the energy and momentum it has developed. The following are the recommendations distinguished between the programme design, system and institutional arrangements.

Programme Design Recommendations

1. Clarify the nature of MPAT as a programme, together with its ownership and key roleplayers.
2. Clarify the distinction between management practice and management performance.
3. Clarify and define the purpose of MPAT as supporting learning and improvement within departments and across government.
4. The focus areas and standards of MPAT should be reviewed, with an intention to include asset management and information management.
5. The MPAT design and programme theory should emphasise horizontal learning and knowledge sharing as a key mechanism of change.
6. The support roles and responsibilities that partner departments play in terms of the development and implementation of departmental improvement plans should be clarified.

7. MPAT programme design should explicitly cater for the ongoing review of standards and underlying policy.

System Development Recommendations

8. The MPAT intervention should be augmented to include a monitoring system on management performance indicators.
9. The current KPAs and standards should be scrutinised and refined, mainly to separate management practice and performance and to specify the results chain for each.
10. The scheduling of MPAT processes should be predictable and allow departments adequate time for self-assessment, uploading and submission and for results to most effectively inform improvement planning.
11. The MPAT website should be improved in terms of ease of access, duration of availability and capacity of traffic volumes before the next round.
12. The moderation process should be revised to ensure a commonly agreed level of moderator expertise or experience.
13. A formal procedure and tracking system for handling all moderation challenges received should be implemented with provisions for direct engagement where feasible and appropriate.
14. A mechanism should be put in place for the regular review or evaluation of policies included in MPAT, triggered by an analysis of MPAT scores.
15. A longitudinal impact study should be undertaken to evaluate the relationship between MPAT standards, management performance and service delivery performance.

Institutional Arrangement Recommendations

16. A new charter or MOU should be developed between the partners, based on a review of partnership arrangements.
17. A structure to co-ordinate the partnership that manages MPAT should be formalised, with a terms of reference.
18. Partner departments should take on the role of providing improvement support.
19. Multi-departmental, multi-sphere funding for resourcing cross-cutting programme across partner departments should be considered.

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Appendix A: Revised Theory of Change

