



planning, monitoring
& evaluation

Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



PSPPD

PROGRAMME TO
SUPPORT PRO-POOR
POLICY DEVELOPMENT

POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Evidence for policy-making and implementation



The Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT)

Improving management practices for better service delivery

The Management Performance Assessment Tool (MPAT) is an evaluation standard used to assess management and improve management practices as an enabler for improved service delivery in government. It is built on the premise 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 outputs produced, the outcomes achieved, and ultimately, the impact our services have on society” (Presidency, 2013).

The MPAT tool has been well-received with high participation from various stakeholders. Nevertheless, it was still important to assess whether it was achieving its objectives of improving management performance in national and provincial government departments. This policy brief presents findings based on the MPAT implementation evaluation, which was conducted for the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) to determine the appropriateness of the framework, its effect on management practices, and how it can be improved.

BACKGROUND

In October 2010, Cabinet mandated the DPME to lead the development and piloting of an assessment tool, working collaboratively with the Department of Public Administration (DPSA), the National Treasury and the Offices of the Premier. Two independent bodies, namely, the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) and the Office of the Public Service Commission, also contributed to the development of the MPAT, even though currently they are not actively involved in the MPAT implementation process.

The introduction of the MPAT was considered significant because of the following important factors in the government management system:

- Improved management practices are regarded as a key element of improved service delivery.
- Weak administration can lead to poor service delivery. The MPAT addresses some fundamental areas of administration, including financial, supply chain, asset, facilities, and human resource management, as well as planning and monitoring.
- As a government that seeks to be a capable and a developmental state, it is important to develop a culture of continuous improvement and sharing of good practice. By its annual cyclical nature, the MPAT is designed to encourage improvement progressively year-on-year and facilitate cross-pollination of learning across peer institutions.
- Institutional performance is linked to individual assessment of heads of departments and accounting officers.
- The MPAT improves accountability, as such results are made public. This approach is set to promote accountability and transparency.

The DPME officially launched the MPAT in October 2011 and reported the MPAT 2011/12 self-assessment results to Cabinet in June 2012. A total of 30 national departments and 73 departments from eight provinces participated in the first MPAT assessment cycle. Cabinet then approved the implementation of the MPAT in all national and provincial government departments for the 2012/13 financial year. For the third cycle, in 2012/13 through to 2015/16, all national and provincial departments participated in the MPAT assessment and this is envisaged to occur in future cycles.

MPAT PROCESS

The MPAT process assesses the quality of management practices in four Key Performance Areas (KPA), and each KPA has specific sub-performance areas which are assessed through a set of prioritised quality standards. The four KPAs are:

1. Strategic management
2. Governance and accountability
3. Human resource management
4. Financial management

Within these four KPAs there are 36 standards which are based on existing policies and regulations. There are also four progressive levels of management practices which are assessed and scored against the KPAs.

Progressive levels of the MPAT

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
Level 1	Department is non-compliant with legal/regulatory requirements
Level 2	Department is partially compliant with legal/regulatory requirements
Level 3	Department is fully compliant with legal/regulatory requirements
Level 4	Department is fully compliant with legal/regulatory requirements and is doing things smartly

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, given that departments feel unfairly judged without sufficient recourse or explanation for negative judgements.

IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

An implementation evaluation of the MPAT was conducted in 2014 using the following criteria: (i) Relevance – the extent to which the MPAT is an appropriate intervention for the public service to improve management performance across national and provincial departments; (ii) Efficiency – the processes through which the MPAT is prepared, deployed, (electronically) undertaken, signed-off, moderated, finalised and reviewed; and (iii) Effectiveness – judged in relation to the evidence of emergent outcomes in terms of management practice and performance.

Sampling for the evaluation was taken from the total population of 155 departments at national and provincial level, but was differentiated by means of a data collection method. Representatives from all the departments were included in the sample for the perception survey. For qualitative purposes, 12 national departments and 4 departments in each of the 4 provinces (16 provincial departments in total) were deemed 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 being the selected provinces.

KEY FINDINGS

To what extent is the design of the MPAT appropriate to assess management performance?

The evaluation found that there is a difference, albeit subtle, between management practice and management performance. Management practice speaks to compliance with existing standards (often around legislation, policies, systems etc.), but does not necessarily equate to good management performance. There is insufficient horizontal learning in the MPAT design. Departments expressed a need for an opportunity to compare, contrast and learn from the differences and best practices between themselves.

Which other tools in the public service are assessing the same areas/standards as the MPAT?

There is some overlap with audits by the Auditor General. In terms of Treasury's Financial Management Capability Maturity Model (FMCM), there is no overlap as it seeks compliance with accounting practices but misses a broad range of practices covered by the MPAT. There is no overlap with DPSA's Organisational Functional Assessment Tool, which is a diagnostic tool, not a means of regular assessment.

What is working well with the MPAT?

There is 100% coverage of government departments. Heads of departments and Directors-General value and support the MPAT assessment and there is significant evidence of internal use and incorporation into improvement planning.

There is clarity on scoring and results are made public. While there is some fear among participants about being seen to be not performing, transparency is a key success factor for the MPAT. Similarly, the DPME is responsive to feedback on the MPAT. There is evidence that feedback is acted upon, particularly where standards are problematic and need refinement.

There is a good partnership between the DPME, National Treasury and DPSA, but the DPME-DPSA partnership could be improved.

What is not working well with the MPAT?

There are insufficient human resources in departments and Offices of the Premier to manage the MPAT and there were many complaints that the web-based software system developed by the DPME functioned poorly and could not handle the traffic at the time of submission. Submissions in themselves are very tight, with there being a period of one month set aside to collect evidence, conduct self-assessment and submit.

Moderation was identified as the weakest point of the MPAT process. The expertise of the moderators is not always trusted by all the key stakeholders.

There are also no opportunities for knowledge cross-pollination or knowledge sharing and learning between the departments. This would be useful especially in the cases of those who perform poorly in certain areas to learn from those who perform well in those same areas.

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 the second and third MPAT cycles. Of the 33 standards applied across the two cycles, 24 standards saw a net improvement in scores, while 5 standards saw a net regression. Although there is a shortage of available data on aspects of management performance respective to the scope of the MPAT, the analyses undertaken did not reveal any evidence to indicate that there had been, as yet, a commensurate improvement in management performance.

Which public service institutions are using the MPAT results? How are they utilising them and what are the benefits? Departments tend to use MPAT results for raising awareness of strengths and weaknesses in management practices (97.8% of departments). There is evidence that some Offices of the Premier have taken the lead by using MPAT results to coordinate and drive improvements in management practice throughout their provinces, although this is not so in all cases and would appear dependent on their capacity.

The DPME uses MPAT results to continuously improve and adapt the tool and its role. This has included pioneering other tools modelled on the MPAT at the local government level and in relation to performance monitoring and evaluation. However, there is little evidence suggesting that DPSA, Treasury and legislatures are using MPAT results as meaningfully as desired.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Detailed recommendations have been made below regarding programme design, system development and institutional arrangements, however, the overarching recommendation is to continue with this programme and build on the energy and momentum it has developed. While other departments will be key in realising the implementation of these recommendations, the DPME will need to initiate and facilitate this process.

Programme design

- Clarify the distinction between management practice and management performance.
- Review the MPAT focus areas and standards, with a view to including asset management and information management.
- Emphasise horizontal learning and knowledge sharing as a key mechanism for change in the MPAT design and programme theory.
- Clarify the support roles and responsibilities that partner departments play in terms of the development and implementation of departmental improvement plans.

System development

- Implement a formal procedure and tracking system for handling all moderation challenges received, with provisions for direct engagement where feasible and appropriate. 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.
- Undertake a longitudinal impact study to evaluate the relationship between the MPAT standards, management performance, and service delivery performance.

Institutional arrangements

- The DPME should facilitate the development of a new charter or Memorandum of Understanding between the key partner departments, based on a review of partnership arrangements. A structure, with a terms of reference, should be formalised to coordinate the partnership that manages the MPAT. Partner departments should take on the role of providing improvement support and multi-departmental, multi-sphere funding for this cross-cutting programme across departments.



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