



Performance Measurement in the Public Sector Why it's Not Working

Steven Covey, author of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, talks about doing the right things right. In terms of leadership, it also involves motivating people to do the right things correctly. Performance Measurement tools are intended to assist people in understanding if they are focused on the right activities and whether these activities are being performed correctly. For the public sector, the difference between performance frameworks that are currently in place and what needs to be in place are the motivational factors that will enable public servants to realize the value in using performance measurement to manage towards results.

This article discusses the premise of many of the performance measurement frameworks used in public sector organizations, the fundamental flaws with those frameworks, and provides some effective strategies that can be employed immediately to maximize the returns those organizations receive from its performance measurement initiatives.

Public Sector Performance Measurement Frameworks

Many governments have adapted Results Based Performance Management Frameworks, which is focused on results/outcomes, and is more in line with private sector management models. Many governments have mandated a Results Based Management program to ensure that its programs, policies and service delivery outcomes are measured and reported.

Governments have dedicated many resources, time, and effort to ensure that they are measuring results; however, many government employees are simply not using this information to assist in the development of better policies, management of programs and delivery of services. For example, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that over a 10-year period, despite the fact that there has been an increase in the number of departments that are reporting performance information, there has not been an increase in the number of departments that actually use this information to improve process, develop better programs and/or policies¹.

So why is this initiative failing to achieve its overall objective of improving public sector performance?

Issues with Public Sector Results Based Management Frameworks

Measuring for the sake of measurement will not result in better government policies, and more efficient and effective programs.

Measuring performance needs to be relevant to those who support/administer the management process. This will be the only way to garner enough support such that public sector employees will actually use management information to make better decision. For example, if a program is in place to help unemployed people become gainfully employed, then the program administrators need to understand if their training and support programs are achieving these results. In this example, program administrators might also want to know if their programs are as effective as they should be and; what would be an indicator of whether the program was a success or a failure. This type of information would be relevant and helpful to these program administrators and would likely result in improvements in program outcomes.



However, with so much time, money and resources invested in the existing Results Based Programs, how do government officials change direction without disrupting the current program?

Quick and Effective Solutions

Like the GOA, it is a critical first step for the public sector organizations to take stock and determine if its initiatives are achieving their overall goal of improving public sector performance.

Government central agencies, which are responsible for reporting public sector performance, need to change their indicators of success from the number of government departments reporting required performance information to the number of departments that have used performance information to manage more effectively. An alternative success factor would be, how have departments that use management information improved?

Finally, more emphasis needs to be placed on ways to assist public sector employees to do the right things better. This can only happen when the public sector has relevant feedback/information that supports the management programs that they are responsible for.

¹ Government Accountability Office, Results Oriented Government, GPRA has Established a Solid Foundation for Achieving Greater Results, Washington D.C., 2004