



Interrogating Leadership Paradigms Using a Public Sector lens

CREATING HORIZONTAL LEADERSHIP SPACES FOR INCLUSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL) PRACTICE

PRESENTER: PHILIP BROWNE



TWENDE MBELE



Public Service M&E - Core Argument

- The practice of Public Sector monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is embedded within a hierarchical management structure and positioned in a routinised and default compliance framework.
- As a result, it loses its potential to be a progressive element of government planning and programming.
- It turns the wheels of government systems but fails to see new possibilities and struggles to deal with complex development challenges (wicked problems) where conflicting interests and priorities, and incomplete and contradictory information make establishing shared facts and understanding difficult.
- The leadership and management structures within public services are generally vertical and based on regulated authority and line management principles.
- The systems and practices associated with MEL that work within government at central and devolved levels also operate within these organisational power structures.
- While mid-level MEL officials may understand the technical aspects of their practice, they are constrained by the vertical decision-making authority of senior officials who may have little or no interest in or understanding of the capabilities of MEL beyond its performance management component.

Public Sector MEL – Embedded in Leadership and Bureaucratic Structures

POWER

Ideology is a core and contested concept in the social sciences, but is deployed in leadership research to highlight the political, embedded and/or obscuring nature of ideas about leadership:

- Typically, the concept of leadership itself is inherently ideological in that it legitimates or privileges managerial / organizational interests and conceals other groups, other ways of organizing and alternative ways of thinking and being.
- Leadership within the civil service is vertical - embedded in rules-based hierarchical structures and gradations of power and authority – and can manifest in different ways – for example Power ‘over’ versus power, or disempowerment versus empowerment
- ✓ Understandings of leadership are shaped and informed by the power dynamics inherent to class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

- Bureaucracies have clear lines of command and control.
- Bureaucratic authority is organized hierarchically, with responsibility taken at the top and delegated with decreasing discretion below.
- The capacity to coordinate and control a multiplicity of units is essential.
- Rational-legal authority necessitates uniform rules and procedures, thereby enabling it to follow precedent and standard operating procedures.
- Authority is the glue that holds together diversity and prevents units from exercising unchecked discretion.
- Command and control provide for increasing responsibility upward, delegation, and decreasing discretion downward.



Impact on Public Sector Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

What do these kinds of challenges mean for effective MEL leadership – and specifically the kind of leadership capacities that can navigate through these challenging constraints?

- ∅ Public sectors typically operate within vertical authority systems that have formalised chains of command and are characterised by top-down decision-making process within a hierarchy of clearly defined titles, roles, and responsibilities – MEL officers are generally mid-level.
- ∅ This structure is rooted in the managerialist and functional understanding of organisations and privileges elements such as control, accountability, and measurement, and reflects an ideologically determined belief in the importance of tightly managed data and information.
- ∅ Layers of bureaucracy and multiple lines of authority slow down decision making and create departmental and practice silos that make it difficult for MEL units to collaborate and adapt to change.
- ∅ The commitment of the organisation’s leadership to an effective MEL practice may be questionable given that support is not necessarily linked to conviction and transformation but rather just serves as an act of compliance with a mandate

What should Public Sectors be Measuring?

- Many countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region have long term visionary development strategies that aim to create **equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies** that ensure that no one gets left behind – monitoring SA's National Development Plan (NDP) for example must reflect equity and inclusion values through data management and analysis.
- All these planning visions incorporate the principles of sustainable, holistic and inclusive development based on national value systems – these must be translated into and reflected through MEL practice.
- These strategies align with the **'Leave no one behind'** agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – these values should be reflected in Public Sector MEL systems, embodied by MEL practitioners and reflected in the nature of data.
- The **SDG Index** is an assessment of each country's overall performance on the 17 SDGs with scores signifying a country's position between the worst possible outcome (0) and the best, or target outcome – the index can be integrated / adapted to country Public Sector MEL systems.
- In addition to the 17 SDGs the UN has developed the **six SDG Transformations scorecards** based on the assumption that all 17 SDGs can be achieved through six major societal transformations – these can also be integrated / adapted to country Public Sector MEL systems.



What should Public Sector MEL be doing?

Effectively monitoring the SDGs at country level are dependent on several critical and transformative country level enablers:

- The quality, granularity and reliability of national data and how statistics feed into national, regional and global indices and dashboards.
- The legislative and policy terrains within countries and the extent to which these can support or hinder inclusion, and subsequently a transformative MEL practice.
- The degree to which the capacity and commitment of MEL practitioners within public sectors are aligned with a genuinely internalised equity driven paradigm of MEL.
- The existence of a progressive, informed and collaborative leadership working horizontally that drives a transformative MEL agenda.

Are these enablers in place in the Public Sector MEL space?

From within the constraints of public sector MEL practice, are there opportunities for forms of horizontal leadership?

- ? Is there space for an approach that is disruptive of conventional leadership practices – for example typologies such as matrixed, relational, or bridging leadership - that can function both within and across formal power structures and leadership hierarchies?
- ? Is this notion of power in a positive sense viewed or experienced not as a commodity, concentrated within certain individuals, but as a generative force distributed throughout the social field (units or directorates)?
- ? Are MEL recruitment, orientation, management and performance practices geared solely to compliance, or reflective of an understanding that transformational MEL practices are an amalgam of compliance on the one hand, and innovation and boundary stretching on the other?

Reflecting on Horizontal Leadership and MEL Practice



- Within the practice of MEL the horizontal leadership approach, or epistemological positioning, opens new and equity-inspired potentialities for the profession.
- These potentialities exist beyond the boundaries of conventional data collection and processing, opening out into areas where MEL can best serve a transformative developmental approach.
- Using inclusive and disaggregated data so that governments and organizations better understand, address, and monitor the needs of marginalized / vulnerable / stigmatized people and ensure no one is left behind.
- There is a global move towards a reconceptualized form of inclusive MEL, exemplified in the initiatives such as the *Inclusive Data Charter (IDC)* and the *Equitable Evaluation Initiative (EEI)*.

Who Should be Leading Public Sector MEL Structures?

- Leadership for equity (in the sense of taking a lead) can be dispersed across organisations and units with nodes of expertise and best practice distributed across a collaborative team of practitioners.
- The leader takes on the role of a facilitator of joined-up excellence, and in this role can drive an equity-oriented practice.
- This requires certain personal qualities – for example someone who is not just tolerant of difference but rather so comfortable with it that they are willing to embrace it and make it a characteristic of the workplace.
- This is also about engaging with colleagues through advocacy, sensitization, and knowledge sharing – building MEL competencies in working with data in the context of equity and inclusion.
- This could include building a culturally responsive and sustainable practice linked to critical thinking with regards to issues like race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Within this kind of relational paradigm dispersed leadership will create a network of feedback loops, and practices of mutual accountability for the production of high-quality data within a framework of equity-informed data analysis.

