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# MONITORING SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

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# Chapter 3: Problematising the Coupling of Monitoring to Performance Management in the Public Sector

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## Coupling of Monitoring Systems and Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa

The public sector in sub-Saharan Africa is under pressure from various angles to justify their actions, efficiency, outcomes, and impacts on the development aspirations of their citizens (Médard 2017; Schuppan 2009). Some of this pressure is arising from internal players such as political leaders interested in demonstrating their capacity for service delivery to their citizens. On the other hand, citizens are also pressuring the public sector to demonstrate that taxes are being used effectively to achieve outcomes and impacts. External stakeholders such as multilateral institutions and non-government organisations (NGOs) supporting sub-Saharan African countries are also pressuring the public sector to deliver development results and stem the perennial problem of corruption. The pressure is primarily shrouded in the New Public Management (NPM) reforms promoted as a panacea for poor public sector performance. The NPM, which emerged in the 1980s, is regarded as an attempt at business-orientated reformation of the public sector, and an attempt at improvement of government efficiency regarding the use of ideas and management models borrowed from the private sector (Hood and Jackson 1991). The reforms emphasise the centrality of citizens who receive services as public sector customers. There is an imperative to institute public sector performance management for both individual public sector employees and institutions within these reforms.

The NPM reforms have been advocated as crucial to the strengthening of public sector performance, resource allocation, and use of evidence in decision making, resulting in improved programme efficiency and effectiveness in developing coun-



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tries (Wanyonyi 2019). The World Bank, a multilateral institution that has influenced public sector reforms in sub-Saharan Africa, defined public sector management reform as "the art and science of making the public sector machinery work. It is about deliberately changing the interlocking structures and processes within the public sector that define how financial and physical resources and people are deployed and accounted for" (Blum et al. 2012:2). The reforms are also touted as key to the alignment of government programmes with the needs of the citizens. Several scholars argue that the use of performance monitoring systems in the public sector assists in defining the purposes and goals of public sector activities, and the data from these systems is crucial for performance management in the public sector (Lopez-Acevedo et al. 2012; Mackay 2009; Segone 2008; Tarsilla 2014). These systems are also key to managing public finances and to understanding the results and worthiness of public programmes (Mayne and Zapico-Goñi 2017).

This chapter is non-empirical and attempts to link Weick's (1976) theory of tight and loose coupling to public sector performance monitoring and management, providing insights and broadening the scope of our thinking on public sector performance management. This chapter's goal is to direct scholarly attention to the importance of understanding the nature of the coupling between performance monitoring, decision making, and performance management in the sub-Saharan public sector. Weick's theory is contextualised within sub-Saharan Africa, and within the associated assumption that loose coupling of performance monitoring data and performance management has made the public sector restrained, infrequent, weak, unimportant, and slow to respond to the needs of the citizens (Ayee 2008). There is also an assumption that the coupling between performance monitoring systems and performance management in the African public sector context is impermanent, tacit, easily dissolved, and manipulated (Fatile 2014; Fourie and Poggenpoel 2017; Yanguas and Bukenya 2016). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of public sector literature that deals with coupling; hence, this chapter presents limited examples.

This chapter argues that in the African context, the degree of coupling between monitoring systems and performance management is dependent on the variables they share; the more independent these variables are from each other, the looser the coupling. The chapter also argues that the complexity of the governance and public sector systems in sub-Saharan African countries results in prevalent tight and loose coupling variants, occasionally within the same public sector.

Sub-Saharan African countries suffer from poorly developed performance monitoring systems that lead to poor performance information for decision-making within the public sector (Moyo 2009). It is argued further that performance management is not happening as expected because it is not linked to the monitoring systems or the programmes that are being run by the public sector (Therkildsen 2017). These observations have resulted in several interventions to build monitoring and evaluation systems that seek to strengthen evidence use in sub-Saharan Africa.


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Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have also devised approaches attached to country fiscal support to strengthen public sector performance management and streamline government planning. At their core, these approaches are intended to improve public sector performance at the institutional and public servant performance levels.

The chapter begins by defining key terms such as 'performance monitoring systems', 'performance measurement' and 'performance management'. After defining these concepts, the chapter discusses the relevance of Weick's tight and loose coupling theory to performance management within the public sector. This theory is applied to the available evidence on public sector performance management in the African context. The emphasis is on examining how performance monitoring can help improve policy decision-making, public management, programme efficiency and effectiveness, and public trust using Weick's theory of tight and loose coupling.

Monitoring refers to "a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing […] intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds" (OECD 2009:39). The focus primarily lies on monitoring systems in performance management, as evaluation usually happens later in the programme implementation process. M&E information can serve multiple purposes. These purposes include feeding back into policy and budget decision-making and national planning, improving policy analysis and policy development, helping in managerial activities such as programme management and staff or institutional management, enhancing transparency and accountability, and many others (Mackay 2009). The usual yardstick of success for the M&E system is the degree of utilisation of the information produced. Integration of M&E systems into the institutional architecture improves the utilisation and develops the culture of using evidence when making decisions (Kanyamuna et al. 2019). In the African context, studies have shown that demand for M&E information primarily comes from external actors, such as civil society organisations, development partners, coordinating ministries, and citizens. Politicians and the public at large appear indifferent to performance information until something goes wrong, as they are not often involved in the defining of performance indicators (Bovaird and Loffler 2009:161).

It is important to define what is regarded as performance in the public sector. This chapter adopts the following definition of performance: "A well-performing public program or service is providing, in the most cost-effective manner, intended results and benefits that continue to be relevant, without causing undue unintended effects" (Mayne and Zapico-Goñi 2017:5). These two scholars further describe performance in three forms. The first form is economy, which focuses on minimising the consumption of inputs. The second is efficiency, which relates to the relationships between inputs and outputs, and the third is effectiveness, which details the outcomes achieved in comparison to the expectations. The performance management definition assumes



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that the public sector goals and programme tasks are known, public servants' efforts and performance are verifiable, performance information is effectively communicated, and that there are few variables for managers to control. Lessons from sub-Saharan Africa show that public sector performance is a socially constructed reality, meaning that people or stakeholders shape their experiences of the public sector through social interaction, and that its meaning differs depending on who is viewing it. Some view it from the angle of narrow and specific economic indicators, while others view it using socioeconomic indicators, and yet others have their view shaped by the performance from public opinion perceptions about the performance of specific government departments. It must be highlighted upfront that mentioning public sector performance in the Sub-Saharan African context elicits different perceptions. However, in most cases, these perceptions are shaped by a social reality that includes political leaning, ideology, and the represented interests. There are many different social realities of public sector performance in an environment that receives external fiscal support, such as budgetary support, financial aid, and development loans. To have a clear picture of public sector performance, it is imperative to broadly define performance to include the various interests of the vested stakeholders.

A crucial element of a performance management system is performance measurement which is defined as monitoring that shows where change is required and which will, in turn, produce the desired behaviour that will result in improved performance (Lemieux-Charles et al. 2003). Performance measurement is directly linked to performance monitoring systems. It is generally defined as a regular measurement of outcomes and results, which generates reliable data on the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes (Van Dooren et al. 2015). In simpler terms, performance measurement measures the input, output, or level of activity of an event or process, either quantitatively or qualitatively. The argument is that if an organisation does not collect performance data, it cannot manage its performance effectively and reliably, and in a way which fosters accountability. "Performance management is action, based on performance measures and reporting, which results in improvements in behaviour, motivation and processes and promotes innovation" (Radnor and Barnes 2007:393). In simplified terms, performance management is a type of management that incorporates and uses performance information for decision-making (Van Dooren et al. 2015).

## Tight or Loose Coupling Relationship Between Performance Monitoring and Performance Management

In this chapter, the use of tight and loose theory is examined in relation to the assumption that institutions which purport to follow NPM make use of rationalisation in decision-making, for example, tight coupling between monitoring systems and performance management. The goal of the rationalisation of the link between the


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monitoring systems and performance management is to use evidence in performance management decision-making. The assumption is that rationalised, tidy, efficient, coordinated public service performance management will lead to efficient public servants and better service delivery (Fakir 2007).

Tight coupling of M&E systems and performance management implies interactions between performance monitoring data, decision making, and performance data, while loose coupling implies limited interdependence between performance monitoring data, decision making, and performance management. The application of tight or loose coupling theory will shine the spotlight on features of performance management that have previously gone unnoticed in the African context, enabling the proponents of public sector reform to devise the appropriate coupling for efficient public service. The theory termed 'loose coupling' argues that within organisations, there are specific parts that are heavily rationalised, but many parts also prove intractable to analysis through rationalisation (Weick 1976).

Weick (1976) introduced the issue of coupling in public management, specifically in educational institutions. Weick defined loose coupling as an organisational situation in which elements such as monitoring data, decision-making, and performance management are responsive but retain evidence of separateness and identity (Weick 1976). As such, performance monitoring data, decision-making, and performance management are complementary but do not depend too strongly on each other. In tightly coupled organisations, the opposite happens - there is no slack or buffer between performance monitoring data, decision-making, and performance management, i.e., what happens in one directly affects what happens in the other.

In tightly coupled organisations, supervisors know precisely what all their employees are doing, and management can coordinate all the activities of different departments according to a central strategy. In loosely coupled organisations, employees have more autonomy, and different departments may operate without much coordination (Orton and Weick 1990). Tight coupling is the opposite and involves an interdependence of elements and a level of responsiveness based on this interdependence. Tightly coupled systems are portrayed as having responsive components that do not act independently. In contrast, loosely coupled systems are portrayed as having independent components that do not act responsively (Mayne and Zapico-Goñi 2017).

In describing the coupling between performance data, decision-making, and performance management, terms such as "hard use" have been used to describe tight coupling and presuppose a tight coupling between performance information, and judgement. In contrast, "soft use" leaves more room for slack or buffer between performance information and judgement (Moynihan 2008). Loose coupling allows dialogue and interpretation to mediate final decision-making. Other scholars differentiate tight and loose coupling as a formula-based use of performance



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monitoring information versus an interpretative use, or between summative and formative use (Charbonneau 2011). Van Dooren et al. (2015) provides an example of a performance contract that stipulates sanctions for an agency that does not reach its performance targets, regardless of context. This is an example of hard use.

Weick (1976) highlighted several advantages that loosely coupled organisations accrue. Firstly, Weick (1976) argued that loosely coupled systems can adjust to and modify a specific local issue or problem without affecting the whole system. When applied to the use of performance monitoring information on decision-making for performance management, it is argued that this suits decentralised institutions that are 'ideal for NPM'. Secondly, Weick suggested that loose coupling allows the organisation to respond to each minor change that occurs in the environment, thereby increasing organisational effectiveness. This contrasts with tight coupling, which does not respond effectively to minutiae of the environment.

A third advantage provided by loose coupling includes sensitive sensing mechanisms, i.e., the ability to identify problems and challenges quickly. This makes it possible to trigger decision-making at the local level without sole reliance on performance monitoring information or consultation from leadership and funders.

A fourth advantage is that if one portion of a loosely coupled system breaks down, it can be contained, and the effect on other parts of the organisation is minimal. The fifth advantage is the capacity for self-determination and more discretion in a loosely coupled system. A final advantage is that these systems are inexpensive.

It is important to highlight that the level of coupling is determined by the elements that are shared by the performance monitoring systems and performance management. These elements are defined by the intended use of performance monitoring data, such as accountability, learning, performance budgeting, and evidence-based policymaking. The use of performance data defines the coupling. In some cases, it becomes a loose coupling, while in others it becomes a tight coupling, and in some situations, it is decoupled altogether. It also shapes the indicators that are being tracked by the monitoring systems.

As stated earlier, public sector performance is a social construct. It can be argued that loosely coupled systems increase the pressure on public servants to construct or negotiate some kind of social reality that they can live with.

## Sub-Saharan Africa Public Sector Coupling

Over the last few decades, countries in the Global South have experienced pressure to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that increase their evidence use in decision-making for an effective and efficient public sector (Porter and Goldman 2013). Public servants are expected to justify their actions and account for the


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programme outcomes. Despite this push, Binnendijk (2000) states that "a central feature of the reforms has been the emphasis on improving performance; that is, on ensuring that government activities achieve desired results. Performance management, also referred to as results-based management, can be defined as a broad management strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way government agencies operate, with improving performance (achieving better results) as the central orientation".

The push for performance management has its roots in donor fatigue marked by declining international aid and foreign assistance (Warwick 2019). Sub-Saharan African countries are regarded as bottomless pits, and funders are increasingly eager to see results from the development support that has been pumped into these countries for decades (Alonso 2012). The effect of this sees the push to strengthen the coupling between monitoring and evaluation of the programmes and performance management to improve the management of resources and programme outcomes. Within governments, the push involves ensuring that the government becomes more efficient and uses evidence for decision-making, which results in the push to develop performance monitoring systems aimed at measuring the performance of programmes, and ultimately the performance of the public servants.

In developing countries across the Global South, there is a concerted effort regarding the reformation of the public sector administration, with a focus on the three areas of performance defined previously. There is an economic push aimed at strengthening the economy, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector. These reforms arose from the realisation that public sector performance is affected by the following: (i) stagnant development despite continuous investment in the form of fiscal support, (ii) increasing corruption and ballooning public sector expenditure, particularly regarding wages, and (iii) poor performance on key development outcomes (Ayee 2008; Polidano 1999; Schiavo-Campo and McFerson 2014).

Interventions such as public sector employee audits, privatisation of public services, economic structural adjustment programmes, and the enacting of monitoring and evaluation systems to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public programmes have been implemented across sub-Saharan Africa (Mercy 2011; McCourt 2013). Owing to a lack of resources, these interventions are mainly externally driven through multilateral institutions, UN agencies, Global North countries, and NGOs (Taylor 2016). Internally, the push for neo-liberal multiparty democracy has resulted in changes that promote NPM, such as decentralised governance systems and increased use of evidence in decision-making.

This section will argue that two systems control public sector performance management in African public sectors. The first is the technical system, which is made up of the technical public sector employees who enjoy some insulation from the political arm of the state. The insulation is a result of the means by which the



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public sector is designed. In functioning democracies, the bureaucracy should be insulated from the political actors to function effectively. If bureaucrats can be hired, promoted, and fired by the political leadership without institutional restrictions, it will affect how institutions operate, increasing inefficiency and corruption (Mueller 2015). This chapter will later argue that there is always a thin line of insulation between the bureaucrats and political leadership.

The second system is found at the institutional level, where institutional managers interact with external forces. The openness to outside forces leads to looseness that produces flexibility at the institutional level.

## Colonial History's Influence on Coupling

Monitoring systems, performance measurement, and performance management are part of governance systems and largely depend on the role of political players and the bureaucratic arm of the state. In the African context, colonialism played a crucial role in developing post-colonial governance systems and how various stakeholders who use these systems view monitoring systems and performance management systems. Colonialism affected governance and performance management in the following ways: Firstly, post-colonial states in Africa adopted governance systems in which accountability lay with the colonisers. In its design, the colonial state was an extractive state that produced resources for industrialising Western countries and as such was accountable to the Western colonisers (Matunhu 2011). Accountability to citizens during colonial times was skewed toward a specific racial group, which resulted in the post-colonial state adopting the same governance approach that sought to meet the needs of a select population or stakeholders (McKeown 2011). The implication was that monitoring systems for whole government work were non-existent or weak, which perpetuated the struggle of African countries to build these systems. It is commonly agreed that the end of colonialism brought about change in the political system, but the economic system remained with the former colonisers who controlled the extractive industries, which continued to provide raw materials to western industries (Chikerema and Nzewi 2021). Essentially, former colonisers controlled the levers of public policy, resulting in the public sector of sub-Saharan Africa having a diverse post-independence accountability matrix (Beekers and Van Gool 2012).

In sub-Saharan African countries, the involvement of former colonisers continues through aid and financial support provided by multilateral institutions under the banner of "development facilitation". It can be argued that this support is a neo-colonial practice designed to sway decision-making processes within the public sector through mobilising organisations or states providing aid or foreign investment. The implication of this will be further expanded upon later in this chapter.


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In addition to the neo-colonial challenges, sub-Saharan African countries have been mired in corruption that has dramatically affected the performance of the public sector. Although corruption is widespread across the globe, its impact is widely felt in developing countries with limited resources. Corruption diverts resources designated to a select few rather than the impoverished, which leads to an increase in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (Ibrahim et al. 2015). Corruption has adverse impacts on the performance of the public sector; the public sector has noted a lag in performance in countries with prevalent corruption. At the institutional level, corruption diverts resources intended to make a significant development impact to a select few. Corruption indices are highly correlated with other measures of bureaucratic efficiency. In essence, low levels of corruption enable the state to enact improved service delivery to the population.

The application of Wieck's loose coupling theory shows that decision-making is not as straightforward in situations where the performance monitoring systems are weak or non-existent. In the African context, colonialism led to the development of fragile authoritarian states geared to respond to the needs of the rulers and not necessarily to respond to the needs of the citizens. This governance structure emanates from how colonial states were set up; colonial states were not designed to respond to the needs of the natives but to serve the needs of the few settlers and the colonising country (Dotson 2018; Hyden 2020). Governance was enforced by a brutal system that quashed dissent, creating a culture where decisions from senior administrators are not questioned or doubted, even in situations where evidence disagrees with the decisions (Weitzer 2020).

The argument put forward is that monitoring systems were tailored to track the effectiveness of the state in meeting the needs of the settlers and the colonising country, not necessarily the native population. Differences in the levels of service delivery attest to this discrimination as areas inhabited by the settlers received better services, such as road networks, water, and electricity, while areas inhabited by the natives suffered from poor service delivery.

## Informal Decision Making Structures

The post-colonial states in Africa adopted this undemocratic and authoritarian rule that still influences monitoring and performance management issues. The brutality of the colonialists' administration system was inculcated in the minds of anti-colonial leaders of the time, who later became leaders of the independent African states (Bayeh 2015; Chikerema and Nzewi 2021; Fidelis 2021). In the post-colonial state, colonists were replaced by a ruling party that took over their position. As a result, performance was also designed based on the ruling party political actors' whims (Moyaba 2017). The implication here is that the bureaucracy does not enjoy much insulation from powerful political actors. A fragile line between the bureaucratic arm



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of the state and the political arm of the state results in political patronage that fuels corruption and informality of decision-making in the public sector.

It can be argued that senior managers in government delegate decision-making to informal parties outside of the bureaucratic system, such as individuals from the ruling party with enough political clout to influence policy decisions in government. This affects monitoring systems and performance management in several ways. One of these ways involves data from monitoring systems no longer being crucial to the informing of decisions within the bureaucracy, but rather sees 'hierarchical transmitted pulses' from the political players who direct policy. As such, if programme monitoring information does not conform to these hierarchically transmitted pulses, it is not used for decision-making. Senior bureaucrats can only make decisions in situations where these decisions do not interfere with the interests of the informal decision-making structures (Kezar and Eckel 2004). In instances of decisions being made in informal situations, or when those bestowed with decision-making power delegate their power to informal structures, public servants' performance management no longer depends on the performance of a particular programme, but on the perceptions of informal decision-making structures outside of the state. Loose coupling is the result of the performance of public servants no longer being measured by programme delivery but by informal institutions. Loose coupling results in "administrative patrimonialism", which means that public bureaucratic organisation, staffing, and remuneration is based on kinship or political clientelism, thereby transforming the public office into a privilege or an entitlement (Yanguas and Bukenya 2016).

## Development Aid and Coupling

In addition to political complexity, senior bureaucrats must contend with the international development community that plays a key role in shaping decision-making and policy within the majority of the sub-Saharan African countries that are dependent on development aid and loans from the Global North. The post-colonial state lacks sufficient resources to deliver development goods and services such as housing, infrastructure, roads, water, electricity, and education. Budget shortfalls force the countries to look to the former colonisers and multilateral agencies for development aid or loans for fiscal support (Quadir 2013), which come with conditions that affect the link between monitoring systems and performance management, and the way in which monitoring information is used for decision-making.

The Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) that have been adopted by developing countries primarily situated in East and South Asia, Latin America, and Africa, are an example of the aid and loans that accompany policy directives. Some of these countries include Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Ghana. The purpose of SAPs was to adjust the country's economic structure, improve international competitiveness,


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and restore its balance of payments. The SAPs conditions also determined the performance indicators and data collected, and directly affected how these countries defined performance management.

Zimbabwe adopted SAPs in the early 1990s as a condition for fiscal support by the World Bank and the IMF. Performance monitoring systems to assess the development loans' performance were set up and focused mainly on economic indicators such as tracking budget shortfall, privatisation, public sector expenditure, and wage bill. The IMF and the World Bank regarded the country and public sector to be performing well as the years progressed. However, the citizens felt the brand of the SAPs through the reduction in social spending by the government on food, transport, education, health, housing, and other services. Growth was poor, unemployment increased, textiles and footwear industries closed, and living conditions in rural areas deteriorated, as did social services for the poor (Chattopadhyay 2000; Marquette 1997; Potts and Mutambirwa 1998).

Interestingly, these indicators did not form part of the core performance indicators of the SAPs policy. The citizens regarded the government as failing to deliver its mandate whilst the external stakeholders had a contrary view and blamed drought for other failures of the policy (Alwang et al. 2002). Depending on an individual's social reality, the relationship between performance monitoring information and decision-making for public sector performance can be described as either loose or tight coupling.

## Fragmentation of the External Environment

The push to reform sub-Saharan African countries using NPM resulted in multiple state and non-state actors being heavily involved in producing public goods through all stages, ranging from policy influence to delivery and evaluation. Orton and Wieck (1990) describe this as dispersed stimuli or incompatible expectations. Dispersed stimuli in the African context are the multiple stakeholders with vested interests in public sector performance management (Orton and Weick 1990). An example of the dispersed stimuli is the current practice by NGOs and multilateral institutions (including UN agencies) who bypass the states in sub-Saharan Africa to implement programmes directly in the community (Makoba 2018; Nega and Schneider 2014). In such situations, these programmes contribute to the same indicators that a public sector institution or servant's performance is measured on, which brings about attribution challenges.

In addition to attribution challenges, public sector employees and institutions also must be content with stakeholders such as political leadership, political parties, programme funders, and citizens who lobby for specific policy decisions and the delivery of specific services. In such situations, the public servants respond to conflicting hierarchically transmitted pulses that make performance management difficult and fluid. The presence of multiple actors means that public sector employees,



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the public sector institution, multiple actors, and citizens view the performance of the public sector from different angles. In such situations, there is a question of who defines what is regarded as performance and who identifies the performance measurement indicators. Does the system provide sufficient information to satisfy the multiple actors?

## Coercive Institutional Pressure or Coercive Isomorphism

According to institutional theory, public sector organisations are formed and shaped by external forces through compliance, imitation, and cognitive processes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Proponents of tight coupling yearn for the initialisation of world models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes. The propagation of the implementation of the western form of coupling of M&E data and performance management can be regarded, in this case, as coercive isomorphism – where the public sector is forced to change by external forces that are not the principal recipients of government services and goods. The implication is that public sector performance is not directly linked to the aspirations of the citizens, but to the few funders who are not the intended recipients of public sector goods and services. Coercive isomorphism, as a way of forcing changes in the public sector, can only work when it is tied to the aspirations of the citizens.

The effect of coercive isomorphism happens in the following ways. Firstly, in sub-Saharan Africa, there is pressure for the public sector to reform and mimic the public sector arrangements of the countries in the Global North. Secondly, there is pressure for the public sector to comply with "public sector norms", including the way performance management is measured, regardless of context. Thirdly, the public sector faces pressure to prove their legitimacy through revealing their effectiveness in carrying out their mandates through performance management. In such institutions, choices to couple performance management, decision-making, performance monitoring data, and the construction of institutional structures are driven by what is socially accepted as the correct means of acting, prescribed by the various stakeholders mentioned previously.

## Political Judgement Supersedes Performance Information

Another dimension within the African context is that political judgement supersedes performance information when it comes to decision-making within the public sector. Several scholars have highlighted the thin line between African ruling parties and the state bureaucracy, and have intimated that in most cases, the ruling political elites supersede the bureaucracy, particularly regarding contested issues within the public sector (Bratton and Chang 2006; Mafunisa 2003; Sebola 2014). Political elites are mainly concerned with staying in power, getting votes, and acquiring personal wealth. Countries such as South Africa provide evidence that the ruling party controls key decision-makers within the bureaucracy. In most cases, these are political party


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deployees (cadre deployment) who get their 'marching orders' on key issues from the ruling party (Mlambo et al. 2022; Chamisa 2018; Tshishonga 2014). The same situation has been evidenced in several other African countries.

In such situations, one can assume a loose coupling of performance monitoring information and performance management due to other key issues requiring consideration when making decisions. In instances where citizens perceive a department or public servant to be underperforming with regard to the quality of public services, that same department or public servant can be regarded as well-performing by the ruling party due to their adherence to the ruling party policies. This results in contrary views on performance management. In most cases, this results in the irrelevance of performance management and performance monitoring because of other compelling factors that influence decisions in the public sector. How can a public sector employee or institution be held fully accountable if they do not entirely control the decision-making process? The political elites who enjoy privileges such as access to jobs, public sector contracts, and manipulation of public sector regulations further compound the situation.

## Selective Performance Measurement

In general, across post-colonial Africa, bureaucrats prioritise the setting up of performance monitoring systems to collect data and information required by the funders as a condition for the continuance of budgetary support. Consequently, accountability and compliance systems are used for public sector performance management. Development of institutions such as statistical institutions' financial management systems in the finance ministry was prioritised at the expense of other departments, leading to specific departments having 'tight coupling' between monitoring data and performance management whilst other government departments had a much more 'loose coupling' relationship. The argument is that although finance ministries had a 'tight coupling' in how they allocated resources to government departments, there is evidence that there was decoupling between performance monitoring systems and performance management once resources had been allocated (Andrews 2011). The unavailability of programme performance information that directly links strategy and agenda-setting at the national level attests to this decoupling, as demonstrated during the review of national development policies which reports on the Millennium Development Goals, and subsequently, Sustainable Development goals.

## Causal Indeterminacy and Ambiguity

In addition to the governance and institutional structural decision-making challenges, there is also a challenge of causal indeterminacy and ambiguity that causes loose coupling of performance monitoring information and decision-making. The ambiguity is caused by the unpredictable or unstable preferences of decision-makers



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on policy issues and the fact that in many instances, the public sector problems, solutions, and actions are unrelated to each other. In this context, decoupling makes the measurement of performance using performance monitoring data challenging (Demir and Duan 2020). There is decoupling at the implementation level despite the planning, objectives setting, goals, and performance indicators. National development plans in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Botswana reflect this decoupling; specific goals, objectives, and performance indicators are set, but the programmes implemented do not reflect these processes, making it difficult to measure the performance of the public sector. Where there is decoupling, decision-makers do not value the performance monitoring data because it is dissociated from policy decisions and, therefore, not helpful for decision-making. The disjuncture between performance information and decision-making cycles is evident when programme decisions are made without performance information. The other reason for causal indeterminacy is that performance information is primarily used to create meaning from previous decisions, not to inform current decision-making. As intimated by Orton and Weick (1990), these factors create loose coupling between information activities and decision activities.

## Incentives as Stimuli for Tight Coupling?

Public servants' effectiveness is a key driver for government-led development programme effectiveness, productivity, and economic development. However, what is not clear in the literature is what motivates public servants to be effective and productive. What incentives do they need to use performance monitoring data for decision-making? Incentives are tools used to motivate employees to act in ways that align with the government's interests, in this case, the use of monitoring data. Incentives are considered non-monetary as well as monetary goods used to shift behaviour. It is important to note that financial incentives are hard to come by in the African context because the governments lack financial resources. It is also important to note that financial incentives, as a form of performance management, can lead to other unintended consequences, such as a reduction of non-incentivised outcomes. Incentives can also lead to selective data collection, where data that shows impact is prioritised for collection whilst other data, although relevant, is not collected. In these instances, poor data collection compromises informed decision-making and learning. In addition, incentives can lead to prioritising activites that have the highest marginal returns over those that require effort. Finally, incentives that have been proven to erode the intrinsic motivation of individuals or institutional culture can undermine reputational motivation (Bellé 2015; Georgellis et al. 2011).

Mackay (2007) highlighted that public service is a complicated work environment where decision-makers and managers focus more on the day to day running of their portfolios rather than long-term planning and establishment of monitoring


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systems. "The incentives attached to the use of performance information is a significant contributing factor for effective utilisation of M&E systems, as it answers the questions 'so what?' and 'what next?' (Kimaro and Fourie 2017). In tandem with this view, there has been an inherent realisation by the proponents of public sector performance management that incentives and sanctions for the public servants and their institutions are key for realising any benefits of public sector performance management. Heinrich and Marschke (2010:184) highlighted that the performance of public servants is mainly dependent on how they are managed: "…employees perform better when their compensation is more tightly linked to their effort or outputs, and organisational performance will improve with employee incentives more closely aligned with organisational goals…".

Despite the early need and development of public sector performance measurement, it is still difficult for managers to use these systems for managing public sector performance. Remuneration is not based on specific performance measures or institutional budgets. The implication is that when one tries to implement performance measurement and management, they are faced with resistance and complex systems that require more than performance management to be reformed. Several interdependent political and environmental factors make developing a standardised measurement system for outputs difficult and costly. When a programme fails, several reasons can be regarded as the cause of the failure, and in most cases, the reason has nothing to do with the public servants' performance. Heinrich and Marschke (2010) highlighted that incentives built around inexact and incomplete measures are still widely used in performance management systems for inducing work and responsible management.

There is a current push for accountability and measuring outcomes within the NPM. As highlighted earlier, this is not feasible within the African continent due to limited resources for measuring outcomes, weak or non-existent performance monitoring systems, and other external factors that influence performance. In addition, there are specific challenges such as incentives, skills, culture, resources, and performance indicators that impede the implementation of performance management systems. The overall objective or motivation shapes incentives for the use of data monitoring. If it is for accountability, it will typically affect a few stakeholders or officeholders from the demand side. If the objective or motivation is for the government to learn from its programmes, then the public servants become central. In other cases, M&E data is more for performance budgeting than planning, and finance ministries are key shapers of the demand for M&E.

Incentives can be at a department level where good performance is linked to increased budget allocation, allowing the department to do more. In other cases, incentives may be at the individual level where specific rewards or sanctions are given to the public sector employees. It is also difficult to hold people accountable when public



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servants and departments have limited resources that hamper their performance. In this environment, managers see monitoring data as irrelevant and as a threat rather than aid, potentially being unfair to them. In the case of public sector employees not having control over the resources that influence the programmes they implement; they can only be held partially accountable for the results from the performance monitoring data.

Monitoring systems are central to implementing incentives, as this data is used to understand the level of performance and to allocate the associated reward or censure accordingly. There is limited scientific evidence that shows the performance of development programmes. As a result, it becomes difficult to implement a system of incentives for public servants to use monitoring data in decision-making when the data itself is not available. However, it can be argued that incentives can generate the need for public servants to put up monitoring systems that track the progress of their programmes.

The public servants are on the demand side. Demand focuses on the priority to use monitoring information and evaluation findings to support core government activities. Incentives are there to stimulate this demand that will, in turn, strengthen the supply side in the development of robust monitoring systems resulting in quality data for decision-making.

## Conclusion

What is fundamental in this chapter is that the issue of coupling between performance monitoring and decision-making is determined by several factors that can result in tight coupling in some cases and loose coupling in others. What incapacitates the public sector are visible and invisible factors that influence the governance systems. Factors such as lack of resources, political interference, the international community, and the citizens, have a stake in public sector performance management and play a significant role in the governance systems in sub-Saharan Africa. The overall conclusion is that the coupling between performance monitoring information and decision-making for performance management is defined by several factors, some of which are beyond the control of the public sector. These factors are difficult to navigate and need complex governance reforms to address some of the challenges they pose.


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