The pitfalls or gaps in monitoring and evaluation tools during Coronavirus disease 2019 era in South African municipalities

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ABSTRACT

The South African municipalities have continued to demonstrate weaknesses or inadequacies in monitoring and evaluation (M&E). A possible barrier in South African municipalities is a lack of M&E expertise. While M&E can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and efficiency of a programme, some potential pitfalls and gaps were discovered during coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). A case study design was employed to conduct in-depth and detailed examination within two metropolitan municipalities in the Eastern Cape. A mixed methods approach was adopted in a convergent manner for data collection and analysis. In-depth interviews were utilised to collect data from 15 senior municipal managers at the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) and the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM). A total of 191 questionnaires were despatched to municipal employees and 186 were returned, giving a 97% response rate. The findings reflect the weaknesses of M&E policies in the municipalities and paints a picture of M&E not being prioritised in the municipality. The findings also reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned, which is that there are pitfalls and gaps when it comes to evaluation measures. Thus, the study concludes that accountability for financial and performance management is non-existent. This study attempts to make a valuable contribution by providing technical assistance, capacity building to ensure that municipalities have effective M&E systems in place to monitor and evaluate service delivery and improve the lives of communities.

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Introduction

South African government has been heightened by the increased quest for improvements in the delivery of results that are truly beneficial to the broader society. However, the combination of COVID-19 and corruption has revealed how a lack of ethical leadership and effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems can cripple a country’s effective response to a situation in a time of crisis (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020). There is evidence that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of M&E capability presents a potential hurdle in some municipalities (Evans, 2020). The Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs (COGTA), (2023) also acknowledges the weaknesses of M&E that it has been focusing on compliance reporting and monitoring of their plans, but without clearly embedded evaluation functions. Hence there is a need to have effective and efficient M&E systems, to not only monitor but to conduct evaluations (Abrahams, 2022; South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association [SAMEA], 2013).

Another gap or pitfall in M&E is the failure to act on evaluation findings on municipal functions and activities associated with M&E (Mofolo & Yekani, 2022). If the findings are not acted upon, it can lead to a lack of accountability and reduced confidence in the M&E process (Masvaure & Fish, 2022). M&E is only valuable if the results are used to improve the programme or project (Eresia-Eke & Boadu, 2019). However, if M&E is conducted too late in the programme cycle, it may be too late to make any meaningful...
changes (Dullah Omar Institute, 2020). This has meant that M&E becomes most effective when conducted in real-time or near real-time, as it allows for timely feedback and course corrections (De Vries & Ile, 2021).

Having taken the above matters, Ba (2021) asserts that it crucial to be mindful of possible pitfalls and gaps, such as lack of clarity regarding the purpose of M&E. This implies that if there is no clear understanding of why M&E is being conducted and what it is intended to achieve, it may result in the collection of unnecessary data or failing to capture the most critical information (Ile, et al, 2019). To this effect, the objective of this study is to explore the pitfalls and gaps faced by municipalities to develop and implement M&E tools that are specifically designed to capture the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 era within the selected municipalities.

Literature Review

This study examined the current literature highlighting pitfalls and gaps observed M&E tools during the COVID-2019 era within two metropolitan municipalities. The subsequent sections of this study are structured as follows: a theoretical and conceptual framework, the role of M&E as a tool for sustainable municipalities, accountability for financial and performance matters in municipalities, and information management systems during the COVID-19 era. The primary objective of this literature review is to pinpoint deficiencies in the available data and outline priorities for future research.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The study relies on the Theory of Change (ToC) and Adaptive Capacity Theory as theoretical foundation to address the gaps and pitfalls in M&E. The relevancy of incorporating the ToC is to strengthen M&E systems in municipalities to assess projects, programmes and policies that aim to improve the quality of life of citizens. According to the United Nations (2014), ToC is a mechanism for analysing specific interventions that are expected to yield results in a certain development change based on the available evidence. Reflecting on pitfalls or gaps in M&E, ToC supports municipalities in developing and implementing M&E tools that are specifically designed to capture the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 era. This is complimented by Adaptive Capacity Theory which refers to the conditions that enable municipal officials to foresee and adapt to change, as well as recover from and minimise the consequences of change (Adger & Vincent, 2005). Adaptive Capacity Theory is also adopted because it identifies barriers and opportunities for capacity building for municipal officials to adapt and to innovate (Adams, 2021). Exploring strands of theories pertinent to the impact of an economic shock on service delivery, these two theories could provide insights on how COVID-19 affected the service delivery of municipalities. Hence, incorporating the Theory of Change (ToC) and Adaptive Capacity Theory in this study aims to support municipalities in examining, planning, monitoring, and reflecting on the specific activities within projects, programmes, and policies that instigate changes (Oberlack et al., 2019).

In view of the above, Woodhill (2007) asserts that the ToC can be displayed as a logframe to demonstrate the connection between the inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impact of projects, programmes and policies. This suggest that the key assumptions and risks that underpin the results chain as well as key outputs and related activities required to accomplish intended outcomes. As municipalities experienced lot of changes in the COVID-19 era, ToC should be continuously adjusted to accommodate changes in the environment (Uwizeyimana, 2020). On the other hand, Adaptive Capacity Theory is dependent on availability of resources, information and knowledge and institutions that enable change (Lemos et al., 2007a). This demonstrates the significance of ToC and Adaptive Capacity Theory in M&E tools for municipalities to fulfil their intended goals (Mvuyana, 2023).

Monitoring and evaluation as a tool for sustainable municipalities

Monitoring and Evaluation tools serve as knowledge base information on development programmes results for measured risk-taking and improved decision-making (Acquaah et al., 2013; White, 2009). In the municipal context, these tools include performance management systems, financial management systems, stakeholders’ management systems, and data and information management. Monitoring and evaluation is a performance management tool that promotes accountability through knowledge generation and learning (Ba, 2021). It also generates strategic information for improved learning and decision-making (Parker, 2008). The building of M&E tools remains based on upward-accountability mechanisms and can promote good governance (Porter & Goldman, 2013), and M&E tools are integral parts of the performance analysis of organisations (Gaskin-Reyes, 2023).

Subsequently, the absence of the prerequisites for M&E were consequential to the performance of the South African municipalities during the COVID-19 era (Eresia-Eke & Boadu, 2019). This proves that the necessary M&E capability to ensure proper functionality of existing M&E systems are still lacking (Dlamini & Migiro, 2016; Kariuku & Reddy, 2017; Lahey, 2005; Mello, 2018). This needs a focused approach to institutionalise M&E with technical competencies and skills (Ile et al., 2019). Currently, the M&E is not institutionalised in most local municipalities and appears weak. Morkel and Sibanda (2022) affirm that municipalities are still in the process of discovering what, precisely, an effective M&E system looks like, and what fundamental characteristics and factors are essential to its success, even though some research and practice guides do exist that have shed some light on these. When M&E is successfully implemented, it entails reporting downwards to local communities, and upwards to national government for the purpose of accountability and credibility (Bell & Aggleton, 2016).

Several scholars highlights that the pitfalls to an effective M&E system encompass a lack of political will, insufficient M&E capabilities, insufficient human and material resources, poor technical know-how and poor capacity-building for M&E government.
institutions (Eresia-Eke & Boadu, 2019; Gómez, Olivera & Velasco, 2009; Kariuki & Reddy, 2017; Kuzek & Rist, 2004; Matsiliza, 2019; Thornhill & Cloete, 2014). Based on M&E literature, there are still some pitfalls the study attempts to explore lessons that can be learned during the COVID-19 era to improve effectiveness of M&E.

Accountability for financial and performance in the municipalities during the COVID-19 era

The lack of accountability and integrity in the municipalities during COVID-19 have catalysed the expansion of corruption at all levels. The COVID-19 emergency procurement measures created a massive opportunity for corrupt entities to take advantage of gaps and weaknesses that should not have been there (Mantzaris & Ngcamu, 2020b). The government’s failure to develop, implement and monitor effective systems and processes of internal control and the lack of municipal officials’ capabilities and skills in financial reporting are the main contributors to the non-compliance with the supply chain management (SCM) policies (National Treasury, 2020b). Some municipal officials have been arrested for alleged corruption relating to the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) for COVID-19.

Taking the above into account, vulnerabilities of the supply management system (SMS) have been confirmed by Sibanda et al., (2020) study that officials in the public sector are failing to implement and effectively monitor such systems, in addition to internal controls, financial reporting and oversight – which has contributed to a regression in the audit outcomes. This is a confirmation that the SCM and risks factors threaten accountability in metropolitan areas. The implementation of internal audit controls and policies was found to be weak, which made it difficult to efficiently detect unethical, unfair, inequitable and cost-ineffective SCM practices (Sibanda et al., 2020).

Information management systems during the COVID-19 era

Monitoring and evaluation require data collection and data processing information systems (Matsiliza, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of implementing multi-sector and integrated M&E systems utilizing information communication technology (ICT). The ICT became important in the growth and building of capability at the national, provincial, and local level for government M&E departments in developing M&E systems that respond to particular needs and conditions. It became shocking to learn of the empirical study conducted by the Dullah Omar Institute (2020), which painted a negative picture of the existing realities during the COVID-19 era in South African municipalities. The study revealed that there was no existing websites and no reliable information in many municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the foregoing, the use of technologies could improve the speed and efficiency of the M&E process, especially during COVID-19 era (Dullah Omar Institute, 2020). The reason for effective M&E decision-making is proper information and it must therefore be correctly handled, exchanged and preserved (Matsiliza, 2019). The information may be vulnerable to abuse because of a lack of reliable information, protocols and guidelines. Considering the current infrastructure of the information technology system (ITS), which is being co-ordinated by the Presidency (including National Treasury), performance monitoring and Statistics SA is being aligned with the system of M&E (The Presidency, 2008). It makes it easier for other stakeholders to use information from the source systems of various departments to produce a summary of national, provincial and local performance. Against this backdrop, the analyses of key elements and realities are instrumental in understanding the gaps regarding IT systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study’s objective is to develop and implement M&E tools that are specifically designed to capture the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 era.

Methodology

The study used a mixed methods approach in a convergent core design and the results were merged. The study chose this approach because it offers complementarity, completeness, enrichment, resolution of complex issues, and results quality (Leedy & Ormrod 2021). A case study design employed to conduct in-depth and detailed examination of a case within NMBM and BCMM. A total of 191 questionnaires were sent to the respondents, and 186 were returned, giving a response rate of 97 percent. A total sample of \( n = 191 \) was sampled, according to the Sekaran (2003) sampling table. The researchers used their judgements to select the municipal departments that have continued to provide essential services to communities during the COVID-19 lockdown, such as waste removal, water, sanitation, electricity and disaster management, as well as safety and wellness. In-depth interview questions were used to collect data and targeted 22 municipal senior managers in one-on-one interviews were heads of directorates. These officials form part of the COVID-19 Disaster Management Advisory Forum. Out of 22 municipal senior managers, only 13 managers were interviewed, and the degree of saturation was reached (Guest, Namey & Chen 2020).

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 was used to analyse the quantitative data (Bandalos, 2018). The Cronbach’s co-efficiency alpha values were 0.888, and the total number of items was 10 (0.783 \( N = 10 \)) and was used to determine the reliability of the individual dimensions, with a reliability coefficient indicating a high degree of acceptability, as well as consistent scoring for the different categories of this research (Taber 2018). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise data in an organised manner by describing the relationship between variables in a sample or population (Kaur, Stoltzfus & Yellapu 2018). The standard deviation was made to discover how respondents responded to questions vary or deviate from the mean (Quinn & Keough 2002). In addition, the thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data collected from the interview schedules and the one open-ended
question from the questionnaires (Charmaz, 2009). Confirmatory and explanatory factor analysis were used to confirm existing theories regarding pitfalls or gaps in M&E that are inconsistent with the initial theory (Knekta et al. (2019).

The researchers were granted an ethical clearance by the Nelson Mandela University’s Research Ethics Committee to conduct research in the BCMM and NMBM. During data collection, researchers were guided by the Protection of Personal Information Act of 2013 (Act No. 41 of 2013) to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents throughout the study. This Act aims to protect the personal information processed by public and private bodies including local authorities (Netshakhuma, 2020).

Findings and Discussions

The dimension to investigate the pitfalls or gaps in monitoring and evaluation tools during the COVID-19 era was established. This dimension deals with the responses of employees when asked to respond to the opinion statement. Table 1 summarises the scoring patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-dimension</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The outcomes of projects and their impact on communities are measured</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.8602</td>
<td>1.14459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are adequate monitoring and evaluation procedures on the all-important goal of service delivery</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.7419</td>
<td>1.13331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data and information management need greater accountability, and the security is adequate</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5376</td>
<td>1.09603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees and consultants have sufficient experience to support the evaluation measures</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6344</td>
<td>1.03229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities rely on the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) or on consultants to conduct any evaluations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.0645</td>
<td>1.00061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is capacity building of the employees</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7688</td>
<td>1.12240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation systems have been institutionalised to improve the service delivery</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6613</td>
<td>1.00179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is accountability for financial and performance management</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.8495</td>
<td>1.18956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are adequate monitoring and evaluation tools, as well as oversight processes from COGTA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.7742</td>
<td>1.01480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is support from COGTA to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation tools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.2097</td>
<td>0.97765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own creation

Table 1 shows that 41% of respondents disagreed that the outcomes of projects and their impact on communities are measured, compared to 29% who agreed and 31% who were undecided. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by White (2009) who found that M&E allows for the provision of information to help organisations and communities access the level of success and accomplishment of goals and progress. Recently studies emphasised that it is important to evaluate the outcomes and impacts of projects (Awasthi, 2020).

This finding was confirmed by a senior manager in the M&E Department at BCMM who had this to say: “The municipal council lacks information regarding impact and outcome of the projects, but [the] M&E manager [has] to assist on the political side on M&E to address the issue of outcome or impact as well.”

The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that the outcomes of projects and their impact on communities are measured – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.8602 and the standard deviation was 1.14459. This
indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees disagreed or were undecided on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned, highlighting a significant gap.

This finding confirms the report published by SAMEA (2013), and study of Abrahams (2022), which concluded that South African municipalities are seemingly still facing challenges in finding ways to assess the outcomes and impacts of their projects and programmes. Furthermore, the municipalities are still focusing on the outputs rather than the outcomes (the key focus of M&E).

Table 1 illustrates that 39% of respondents disagreed that there are adequate M&E procedures on the all-important goal of service delivery, compared to 30% who agreed and 22% who were undecided. This finding is contrary to the study of Du Toit et al. (2002) who maintain that service delivery must meet the community’s expectations and demands through the delivery of essential goods and services. This means that municipalities need to apply effective and efficient M&E tools to respond to COVID-19 and deliver essential services to the community.

The mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that there are adequate M&E procedures on the all-important goal of service delivery – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.7419 and the standard deviation was 1.13331. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees disagreed on statements relating to this sub-dimension, with some undecided. This average reflects the weaknesses of M&E policies in the municipalities and paints a picture of M&E not being prioritised in the municipality.

Table 1 demonstrates a high percentage of 54% of respondents who disagreed with the statement that data and information management need greater accountability, and that security is adequate. This compares to 21% who agreed and 25% who were undecided. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018) who concur that in the current government structures on data and information management, the requirement for security and better accountability is still poorly applied in municipalities. The competence of municipal managers and accountability is key to addressing and reducing the effects of COVID-19 on citizens (Ball, 2020).

The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that data and information management need greater accountability and that security is adequate – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.5376 and the standard deviation was 1.09603. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees disagreed, and others were undecided on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect that accountability in these two municipalities need to be improved.

There was a surprising response from a senior manager in the Economic Development Department at BCMM who responded to a similar question, stating:

I think the challenge is that we rely heavily on the IT system, which sometimes is not reliable because it has its own challenges. More so now that we also have the loadshedding in the mix. So, your IT system then will fail because they are very much linked to the power supply. But I think that the biggest challenge is … when you are trying to connect a lot of people in the system and the system will not respond, or you will get poor quality of information. I think the other challenge is because, I think, the issue of face-to-face; it’s something that we have been so used to. So, there will be a delay in reporting in terms of the outcomes that you want because people can meet and sometimes they are failing others; not everybody is technologically savvy. So, others might take time to upload the information that you require. So, there will be that delay in the reporting system.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by the Dullah Omar Institute (2020) which agrees that the IT systems, processes and controls utilised in government during the pandemic were found to be inactive in terms of responding to the required changes. Furthermore, the lack of appropriate and sufficient management of information systems makes it difficult to carry out M&E tasks (Van der Waldt, 2018). This finding implies that there is no proper management of data and information in these municipalities. This is unfortunate, as the use of technologies could improve the speed and efficiency of the M&E process, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason for effective M&E decision-making is that management need accurate information; it must be correctly handled, exchanged and preserved (Matsiliza, 2019).

Table 1 shows that 47% of respondents disagreed that employees and consultants have sufficient experience to support the evaluation measures, compared to 19% who agreed and 34% who were undecided. This finding confirms the findings of the study conducted by Matsiliza (2019); that employees and consultants have limited experience to support the evaluations.

The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that employees and consultants have sufficient experience to support the evaluation measures – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.8495 and the standard deviation is 1.18956. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees disagreed on statements relating to this sub-dimension, while others were undecided. These averages reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned, which is that there are pitfalls and gaps when it comes to evaluation measures.

The qualitative findings confirmed the above quantitative findings on the statement that employees and consultants have sufficient experience to support the evaluation measures. A senior manager in the M&E Department at BCMM said: “People are behaving as if [it is] business as usual. So, the issue of evaluation is really a challenge, and I would say, in my view, it is because even nationally, [in] local government, nothing is really documented.”
Another finding of interest was extracted from the questionnaires when respondents were asked about suggestions for how M&E could be improved in their municipality. One of the municipal employees wrote this:

“Nothing. I will never lie.”

This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Tafeni and Mngomezulu (2020) who concur that COGTA is required to play a critical supporting role in ensuring that municipalities deliver on their constitutional obligation. Nevertheless, municipalities on their own are unable to respond to the service demands due to backlogs fuelled by the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 illustrates that 33% of respondents agreed that municipalities rely on COGTA or on consultants to conduct evaluations, compared to 28% who disagreed. Surprisingly, a high percentage – 40% – of respondents were undecided. The mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that municipalities rely on COGTA or on consultants to conduct evaluations – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 3.0645 and the standard deviation was 1.00061. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees were undecided on statements relating to this sub-dimension, while others disagreed with it. These averages reflect a serious gap in that the most employees are not aware of COGTA’s involvement.

The qualitative findings confirmed the above quantitative findings on the statement that municipalities rely on the COGTA or on consultants to conduct any evaluations. A senior manager in the monitoring and evaluation department at NMBM had this to say:

“I don’t know any intervention from them, I don’t want to lie. Personally, I haven’t engaged with anyone regarding the support. Yes, they will ask questions and say, ‘Do you have or want any support?’ [but] where you propose, nothing will move to get support. Nothing. I will never lie.”

This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Tafeni and Mngomezulu (2020) who concur that COGTA is required to play a critical supporting role in ensuring that municipalities deliver on their constitutional obligation. Nevertheless, municipalities on their own are unable to respond to the service demands due to backlogs fuelled by the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 shows that 42% of respondents disagreed that there is capacity building of employees, compared to 30% who agreed and 27% who were undecided. This finding is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Ngwakwe (2020) and Majola (2014). These authors found that there is a need to broaden the human capacity designated to conduct M&E in public organisations.

The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that there is capacity building of employees – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.7688 and the standard deviation was 1.12240. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from “disagreed” to “undecided” on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect that there is a significant gap in capacity building of employees at these municipalities.

This finding is consistent with the research study of Matsiliza (2019) who concurs that human capacity building in municipalities should be a priority. This is to improve performance, especially in those departments and organisations that conduct systematic performance assessments and M&E. It is noticeable that the municipal employees repeatedly acknowledged that there is no capacity building at all in these organisations.

Table 1 demonstrates that 48% of respondents disagreed that M&E systems have been institutionalised to improve service delivery in these municipalities, compared to 21% who agreed and 31% who were undecided. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Mackay (2006) who concluded that the institutionalisation of M&E systems improves public sector management, evaluation, and capacity development.

The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that M&E tools have been institutionalised to improve service delivery in these municipalities – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.6613 and the standard deviation was 1.00179. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from “disagreed” to “undecided” on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the significant gap in these municipalities.

A noticeable response from a senior manager in the Economic Development Directorate at NMBM had this to say: “Yes, it [has] been institutionalised, though there are still a lot of challenges.” In the study it was noticed that there is a contradictory point of view between senior managers and lower-level employees regarding this sub-dimension. This finding is contrary to the empirical findings discovered in quantitative interviews. All respondents who were qualitatively interviewed agreed that M&E has been institutionalised in these municipalities. The study shows that there is a need to build strong leadership and to champion M&E to strengthen the performance and institutionalisation of M&E systems at the municipal level (Eresia-Eke & Boadu, 2019).

Table 1 illustrates that 42% of respondents disagreed that there is accountability for financial and performance management, compared to 36% who agreed and 26% who were undecided. This finding confirms the research study conducted by Sibanda et al. (2020) who agree that officials in the public sector are failing to implement and effectively monitor such systems – internal controls, financial reporting systems and oversight – which has contributed to a regression in the audit outcomes. This finding exposes a lack of transparency in the matters of financial and performance management in these municipalities.
The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that there is accountability for financial and performance management – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.8495 and the standard deviation was 1.18956. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from “disagreed” to “undecided” on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned, indicating that there is a serious shortfall.

The qualitative findings confirmed the above quantitative findings on the statement that there is accountability for financial and performance management. A senior manager in the Spatial Development Department at BCMM had this to say:

There are bodies which are doing a good job like [the] Municipal Public Accounts Committee. On a monthly basis, they do “summon” directorates to account for certain issues, but that is not enough on its own because once people account, there should be a way [to] follow up to see that they are doing what they said they will do. [The] MPAC as a body is a small committee and is mostly politicians. You then need aid, call it the monitoring department, which will be driven by administrators [who will] follow up on the issues which were raised at that political level and where promises were made that these will be undertaken. The quarterly reporting which is done does leave a gap.

This finding is consistent with the study of Mantzaris and Ngcamu (2020b) who concur that the lack of accountability and integrity in the processes, systems and functions of SCM have been instrumental in the expansion of corruption at all levels. The authors affirm that the lack of accountability and integrity in the SCM processes and systems has exacerbated corruption in municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 reveals that 42% of respondents disagreed that there are adequate M&E tools, as well as oversight processes from COGTA, compared to 22% who agreed and 37% who were undecided. This finding is no different from the current study’s finding regarding the statement that municipalities rely on COGTA.

The low mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that there are adequate M&E tools, as well as oversight processes from COGTA – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2.7742 and the standard deviation was 1.01480. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees disagreed with statements relating to this sub-dimension, while others were undecided. These averages reflect that these municipalities do not have confidence in COGTA.

In the case of South Africa, for example, the pursuit of a capable, efficient and effective state has created a distinctly hierarchical form of governance, which propels compliance and an oversight-driven approach to M&E (Umlaw & Chitepo, 2015:13). In fact, research on the state and the use of M&E systems in the South African national and provincial government suggested “a rather narrow use of M&E for internal monitoring and control” (Umlaw & Chitepo, 2015:13).

Table 1 demonstrates that 35% of respondents agreed that there is support from COGTA to strengthen the M&E tools, compared to 18% who disagreed. Concerningly, there is a higher percentage of 37% who were undecided. This is consistent with the studies of Zanker and Moyo (2020); Mlambo and Masuku (2020) which found that the level of poor governance and corruption during the pandemic portrays a lack of oversight and direction regarding the management of public finances and the dearth of systems to ensure effective governance.

The mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension – that there is support from COGTA to strengthen the M&E tools – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 3.2097 and the standard deviation was 0.97765. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from “agreed” to “undecided” on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned, showing that these municipalities do not get much support from COGTA.

The qualitative findings confirm the above quantitative findings on the statement that there is accountability for financial and performance management. A senior manager in the Spatial Development Department at BCMM maintained that: “COGTA is supposed to play a leading role, guiding the municipality implementing; that did not happen, unlike [in] the Western Cape. Their provincial government COGTA will be hands on in giving guidance. Here that does not happen. It’s other way around – [it] is the municipality who gives guidance to the province.”

This finding is consistent with studies conducted by Zanker and Moyo (2020) and Masuku (2020) who concur that the levels of poor governance and corruption during the pandemic portrays a lack of oversight and direction regarding the management of public finances and the lack of systems to ensure effective governance.

Conclusions

The dimension to examine the pitfalls or gaps in M&E tools was performed. The quest for effective M&E tools explores the gaps and limits in its assessment and ultimately suggests ways to assess the effectiveness of the strategy. The study findings reveal that these municipalities have little idea of measuring the outcomes of projects and their impact on communities. These findings suggest that line managers concentrate only on internal matters at the municipalities and do not consider the impact on communities. This has resulted in delays and uncompleted projects during COVID-19. Strangely, on all the important goals of service delivery, there are no adequate M&E procedures. The findings indicate that there is poor data and information management to improve accountability, and security is inadequate in these municipalities. This suggests that in these municipalities there is a lack of
documentation or evidence that supports the activities the municipality claims have been delivered. These organisations are failing to keep appropriate records.

In addition, when consultants have been recruited, their work has not been adequately supervised in order reap the benefits of their appointment and successfully outsource responsibilities. Shockingly, employees and consultants have insufficient experience to support the evaluation measures. Furthermore, most municipal employees have no idea that municipalities rely on COGTA or on consultants to conduct any evaluations. This finding demonstrates that COVID-19 initiatives, plans and tools and direct provincial government interventions have had minimal impact in these municipalities. This suggest that short-term solutions such as consultants, administration monitoring, and regulations and capacitacion appear to be ineffective. In these municipalities, there is no capacity building of employees. Employees do not know if M&E tools have been institutionalised to improve service delivery in these municipalities.

The accountability for financial and performance management is non-existent. This demonstrates that the notion of internal- and preventive controls persists in these municipalities. For as long as there are weaknesses in the internal control environment, those weaknesses will be exploited and used to abuse the COVID-19 relief fund. There are no adequate M&E tools, as well as oversight processes from COGTA, and there is no support from COGTA to strengthen M&E tools in these municipalities. This finding calls into question how effective COGTA is and how consistent its support has been for these municipalities. Much of the oversight would have to ensure that M&E system controls were institutionalised. This finding reveals a different circumstance: that during the COVID-19 pandemic, transactions in these municipalities should have been managed to ensure that appropriate controls were institutionalised and monitored on a regular basis.

This finding highlights the challenges and gaps in M&E systems. The absence of the prerequisites for M&E – even within organisations that already have an M&E system – may be consequential to the performance of the institution. There is no structure in place to guide and assess whether a COGTA intervention is successful and how long it should continue in a municipality. This is a significant void, which is cause for concern.

Considering the findings of the study, it is recommended that the line managers in these municipalities to work as a team with political officials to address or implement the outcomes and impact of projects as one of the M&E system components. Also, the human resources design performance agreements for project managers that address the outcomes and impact of projects in communities. The study recommends municipal policy and planning unit digress from paper-based documents and introduce technology devices to improve the M&E process to efficiently meet the needs and demands during the COVID-19 pandemic. The municipal policy and planning unit to develop strong policies that support best practices for M&E. The line managers in the Procurement Department need to keep records of consultants in order to hold them accountable for poor service. The municipal policy and planning unit to strengthen financial controls to ensure that they are maintained at the appropriate level and continually strengthened. The municipal manager to find ways to work together with COGTA to ensure the municipality receives the necessary support to ensure the M&E system is effective and strengthen co-operative governance.

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References


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