

Driving transformation through innovation for public sector service delivery

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Service delivery is at the heart of the government's mandate, and technology is a key enabler in improving service delivery. However, technology alone is not a silver bullet.



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Transforming services through ICT that works is essential in enabling the transformation of South Africa as a whole, and in order to create programmes and outcomes that benefit the public, it is essential for the private sector to participate. The talent, skills and experience within the private sector should be harnessed to allow technological innovation that is able to make a real difference in the lives of the country's citizens.

Take, for example, the transportation sector in Austria. Through a Public Private Partnership (PPP), a single ticketing system has been developed by which one ticket can be used for almost all means of transport, such as the metro, buses, trains and trams.

Private businesses can provide the necessary infrastructure for these types of services, such as WAN and LAN services as well as systems, applications and services hosted in the cloud. This can assist the government to take advantage of a pay-as-you-use service enabling it to scale and switch services on and off, as and when it needs them without the costly infrastructure investment. This allows the government to redeploy this spending into other areas and focus on the actual delivery of service rather than the IT aspect and requirements that underpin these services. This reduces the distance between the government and the public.

This example of ICT that works is just one area where PPPs are benefiting both the government and the private sector overseas. Imagine the possibilities in South Africa. These partnerships could create the capability to issue an identity document to a mother who has given birth to her child - before leaving the hospital. Such partnerships can also provide blueprints to international initiatives that can be leveraged for the local market. For example, strides have been made in health care in South Africa based on solutions that were developed for the health care sector in international markets.

Closing the gap

Basic services can be enhanced by closing the gap between citizens and the government to allow service to be delivered where and when they are needed. The possibilities are endless, but what needs to be kept at the top of mind are the need of the citizens, and how technology and innovation can be harnessed to create real benefit. Ease of use and functionality are critical to transformation through technology innovation.

PPPs assist the government in accessing skills that are critical to transformation through technology, and aid private organisations in aligning their services to be relevant to the local market. Transformation is a journey and collaboration between the government and the private sector is a mutually beneficial step on this journey. By partnering private sector entities, the government can benefit from the skills and experience of these organisations.

Ultimately, the government is a business, with the citizens as customers, and should follow trend in terms of employing the right skills, measuring and monitoring solutions against desired outcomes, introducing repercussions for poor performance, and rewarding achievements made.

PPPs have the potential to bring enormous benefit to South Africa as a whole. Corporates are essentially driven by measurable outcomes, bringing the expertise, the methods and repeatable processes to the partnership, while the government brings the challenges and the money. By harnessing the skills of the private sector, the government can improve service delivery to citizens and ensure knowledge transfer to assist in bridging the current skills gap.

By collaborating with the government on service delivery projects, private sector organisations stand to gain additional business, which enhances profitability, in turn contributing towards improving the economy and creating much needed jobs. This is a win-win situation for all involved, and creates a cycle of benefit that continues to grow.

'Partnership' is key

However, for PPPs to be successful, the word 'partnership' is the key. Such ventures should be driven by specific programmes, and focus should be directed at creating a partnership that is measurable in terms of its impact on service delivery. The outcome of the PPP is of the utmost importance: What does this partnership aim to achieve, by when, and how will this be measured? Once these criteria have been addressed, the government will be better able to determine the right private sector organisation to partner in order to deliver according to the desired solution. Partnering on outcomes-based projects with dual accountability is the key to the success of PPPs.

Leveraging the success of such initiatives in other countries by partnering locally-based multinational corporations and adapting these solutions to local scenarios can speed the process of service delivery. The methods, assets, skills and solutions are already available, which ensures that the outcome of the partnership can be more effective.

Ultimately, service delivery through PPPs should be driven by the need to create zero distance between the citizen and the government, closing the gap between those who need services and where services are delivered. Service delivery should be driven by requirements, an understanding of what citizens require, which drives the creation of an approach and the most appropriate partnership between private sector and the government.

In this way, transformation through innovation and ICT that works for South Africa can be achieved, which will make a lasting and tangible impact on the lives of the country's citizens.

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